













# HIS MISTRESS AND I

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## PROLOGUE

MY DEAR PROFESSOR,

It is neither a sick man who writes you, nor is it one of those candidates for an asylum whose letters and actions must be a constant source of annoyance to you. I can assure you that I am perfectly sound in mind and body, and if I write thus to you, it is because I have attended several of your lectures at the *Collège de France* this winter on experimental psychology, and consider (as do many of my contemporaries) that no expert of modern times has had greater success than yourself in perceiving and isolating the morbid element in what men know as love-passions. I have in my mind your lucid analyses that throw fresh light on what you term the Werther case, the René case, as also those of Rousseau, Byron and Musset, and your conclusions almost without exception show these examples of passion to be pathological cases, and the fits of sentimental exasperation that occur in them to be due to either organic lesions or some hereditary blemish.

However, with the prudence of a truly scientific mind, you took pains to warn your audience against exaggerated generali-

zation, for I made a special note of one sentence you uttered towards the close of your last lecture :

“Just as there are men of genius,” you remarked, “who possess perfectly-balanced minds, and just as abnormal muscular strength is not a physiological blemish, so there are certain beings possessing a perfectly healthy organism who are constructed to experience the passions of love more violently than the average.”

I believe, Sir, that I am one of these, for in my case, the thing that poets and novelists call the heart, is broken, but the muscular organ physiologists describe by the same name, beats with its usual rhythm, and without the slightest irregularity or tension. My mind is overwhelmed with trouble and destitute of all hope, but my brain is but too active, whilst the faithfulness of my memory and the keenness of my imagination torment me, for I am an intelligent and cultivated man. When I heard those words of yours, that I have quoted above, I knew myself to be one of those pitiful beings who can experience both the extreme of happiness and the most atrocious suffering from their love, whilst retaining perfect health and a strict mental equilibrium.

I seemed to feel that you were looking at me at the very moment you uttered those words that touched my case so nearly. You may pos-

sibly remember a very attentive listener seated at the right end of the second row, a clean-shaven man with greyish hair, still fairly good-looking, more mature than the majority of your audience, better dressed too and evidently of a higher social standing, for your eyes, I am certain, rested on him at that precise minute and you had a feeling that your thought had taken shape as a living reality.

There is assuredly no reason why you should devote an hour of your time to reading of what life has done to me, but I think I should feel gratified if you were to peruse the following sheets, although I must resign myself to the possibility of their being thrown into the wastepaper basket or deposited along with many others in some pigeonhole whence no one will ever bother to remove them, except maybe to sell them by weight for what the paper will fetch. I sincerely hope that you *will* read them, for everything that I have written occurred exactly as I have related it. I have told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. I have not hesitated to tell you that I am intelligent and still fairly handsome, nor shall I hide or excuse what offends or displeases me in my own nature. Knowing and admiring your work as I do, I feel that such an addition to your documentary treasure cannot be a negligible one.

Moreover, if the reading of this story of mine

takes you but an hour, it will take me at least a week to write it, and during the whole of that week I shall have some shadow of pretext for living.



## HIS MISTRESS AND I

### I

IN order to avoid all unnecessary remarks and keep this confession of mine in the nature of documentary evidence, I propose to cut down the relation of all that concerns my childhood to a strict minimum. Suffice it to say, that I was the only child of a good middle-class family who respected the social conventions, the ruling power and religion, and who possessed comfortable means, honestly acquired by industry through two generations. We lived on the outskirts of Versailles, and it was at the College of that town that I was given the whole of my education and soon came to be considered as the most brilliant boy in my class, for every year I carried off nearly all the prizes in the most varied of subjects, ranging from rhetoric



to geometry, and from modern languages to drawing and gymnastics. In the same class as myself, however, there was another pupil, already a great friend of mine, but whose depth of character and gifts of investigation and invention were vastly superior to mine, as were also his passionate keenness and untiring ardour for learning. Yet one can conceive of no temperament less adapted to school discipline than Robert Moret's, for the encyclopædic futility of the syllabus sickened him, and being utterly indifferent to success as such, he only worked at those subjects that seemed to him worthy of study. Occasionally, when a master questioned him, he would give the impression of absolute ignorance, almost of stupidity, and reply, "I don't know" with the same quiet assurance as he might have stated, "I can't see" in the middle of the night. On the other hand, when he did know anything, he generally received a black mark for knowing too much and was apt to be considered pretentious through the very complexity of his intelligence. That is the reason why I used to get the better of him in all our scholastic tussles, with banal facility and far less effort than he exerted.

And yet I used to toil away at my studies, in spite of a nature somewhat inclined to indolence, and the reason I forced myself to work is worth noting, for I should think it must be a rather strange and rare trait in a boy of fifteen.

I will endeavour to explain it as I have since viewed it. The reason was this.

I was ignorant neither of my parent's means, my pleasing appearance, nor of my intelligent and frank nature, but I noticed that, even in that miniature society that goes to make up a school class, there were wealthier and more striking-looking scholars than myself, and Robert Moret's companionship compelled me to appreciate my intellectual inferiority at its proper value. With that aptitude for judging myself fairly that I possessed even at that early age, I once had occasion to remark to Robert :

"In almost every subject I'm above the average, but somehow I don't find it of the slightest advantage to me to be in the leading set. *You* are certain to be amongst the 'first flight' in something—I don't know exactly what as yet—but it's a certainty anyhow."

I probably expressed myself in that slang used by boys at school when they are beginning to be tortured by anxiety for the future, when they are trying to express themselves and gauge their strength before starting life. We had adopted the idea of the "first flight" by analogy with those cycle races that were then so popular with schoolboys in our country.

Robert, shaking his big head with its over-long mop of hair and strong plain features like those to be found on some masks, and gazing at me with those soft eyes of his that were

neither blue nor grey, small nor large, but whose glance was full of light, comforted me by replying :

“ My dear old thing, you’re far better off, for you’ve only got to choose your ‘ flight ’ to be in it. You certainly don’t go very deeply into things, because you are inclined to slack, but you soak up everything you set yourself to learn. You read well and write well. I can see you being a lawyer, a deputy or a minister, one of these days . . . ”

What remarkable conversations are held by boy friends as they stroll on the playing-fields, before taking the final examinations that are to set them free from school discipline—conversations remarkable for their sincerity, their zest for the future, and, above all, for their charity and their desire that life may be generous to all, even to those who may be preying on their like in the days to come ! Striking also for their swift transit from intellectual heights, artistic professions of faith or algebraical discussions, to crude materialisms, the brutal expressions of male desire, or suddenly, to subtle hopes of frankest sentiment ! Our intellectual friendship knew violent disputes over politics and religion, for Robert was a positivist, proud of his plebeian origin and illegitimate birth, whilst I was naturally conservative, brought up by a practical father and retaining an instinctive tenderness even towards those prejudices my

reason denounced. We were no exceptions to the law formulated by Balzac—that “woman” should ever be the subject of discussion in boys’ schools, and that likewise, the hope of a male sweetheart be expressed amongst girls. Robert and I talked about women without prudishness, be it understood, in the warmth of our young blood, but at least without that insolence or affectation of contempt with which boys often vent their ignorance of woman and her disdain. Although differing from each other in so many aspects of our natures, Robert and I, wandering off on our own away from our coarser-minded companions, confessed to each other the hunger that lived in our hearts and our hopes for a great passion of love. He, the son of a worthy mother, had seen the marital love she ever retained for the traitor who had abandoned her, and had heard her say, when her hair was grey and her whole being worn out in bringing up her son, “I would do it again!” I, orphaned of my mother from early childhood, felt that she continued to live in my father, who had adored her passionately, and that the dear dead one was calling and slowly absorbing the whole substance of a heart that was not destined to beat much longer. With a warmth of shyness we confided to each other our fondest hopes and, whilst our comrades were exchanging their desires for vulgar and early happiness, registered to each other our intentions to

deserve, know, and lead a passionate existence. Whilst they secretly perused Casanova, Sade or Nerciate, we—like the young folk with pale faces and long hair who had trod the same fields some sixty years before—devoured the works describing the wonderful cases of Werther, René and Dominique; but being children of our century, we read these in different fashion from those pale lads with hair curled over their foreheads. In that decisive way boys have of criticizing their elders, Robert said of them:

“They were right in thinking that man’s fulfilment is in love, but they were wrong in considering love to be a loss of equilibrium, for it is, on the contrary, an illustration of perfect mental balance, and,” added he, looking at me without jealousy but not without a certain sadness, “only a few privileged ones come to that supreme balancing feat. Probably you will, for you look like a potential lover, but as for me . . .”

He was better than “not bad-looking”—and I hastened to tell him so with heat—with his sturdy frame, his great head with its rough-cast features, rather sallow colouring and that glance of his, that I could only compare to a double beam of ideal light; with the authority of his measured gestures and his voice that was at once sonorous and soft, if one can so express it, like the deep notes of a piano when a clever

player touches them and presses the soft pedal.

I continued with a conviction that rekindled his hopes, "Come now, my dear fellow, you possess a most striking face. All the women look at you as you pass, for that I've noticed myself; and besides, you're going to be *someone*. You will be celebrated, and fame always attracts women. Look at Chateaubriand, Bourget, or d'Annunzio!"

That celebrity gave men an advantage in the conquest of women was a conviction I had gleaned from reading history, and that I did not think was capable of argument.

That then is the reason—I have got to it at last by a long detour—why I forced myself out of my natural indolence, seriously to attack my studies and prepare my successes on the prize-lists. It is a feature that I think lacks banality and is really worthy of note, that round about the year 1906, a college in France harboured a gifted but lazy youth devoid of all ambition relating to wealth or honours, and that that lad overcame his idleness in the hope of winning a greater love if he became famous and rich! It had been a reasonable and practical enough hope, had the boy aspired to diverse and numerous adventures in gallantry, for women who lend themselves to that, having scarcely the time to make a choice, and being impelled by feelings that are prompter than their own judgment, drift instinctively to those men indicated

to them by their reputation for looks, wealth or fame. It was, alas ! a chimerical hope in the less futile object of our youthful desires, for glory, looks and wealth have no vast power to sway the women we dreamed of—those who are really animated by a pure love, without any ulterior motive or interest.

\* \* \* \*

But that is enough—and indeed far more than I intended to say—concerning my childhood and Robert's. A reader skilled in the study of the human brain and heart, as is he to whom I am appealing, will now be acquainted with the two youths whom a superficial observer might have thought to be survivors of a romantic age, but who were in reality quite typical of their time owing to the realistic discipline they imposed on their very romance, preparing themselves to love in very much the same way as a young prince prepares himself to govern, by assimilating all that he learns at school and all that he observes in life.

Before going any further, I should like to make it clear—but is there really the necessity for so doing?—that the names of the persons and places I have mentioned, or am going to mention, in the course of this confession, are not real names, for, as it will soon be seen, the real ones cannot be divulged. I tried at first to write my story without giving any names at

all, and doubtless that would have been an excellent scheme had I been a professional writer, but, lacking practice, I could make no headway. So therefore I altered the indispensable names, such as Versailles and Robert Moret, and shall call myself, though it is not of course my true name, Antoine Hermanault.

To conclude, there is one name whose true characters I shall certainly not possess the strength to trace, and of the person who bore that name I shall presently have to speak.







## II

THERE are poets, moved by some sort of insipid sentimental tradition, who laud to the skies the season of life that follows adolescence, comparing it to the springtime of the year, doubtless in the conviction that they are thereby eulogizing both youth and spring, but in my humble opinion, they can be compared to each other through attributes common to both that render them equally hateful to me, an atmosphere alternately clear or misty, swept by winds that are either icy or burning, and the uncertainty of the climatic conditions of one or the other that throws a load of anxiety on to shivering souls, temporarily overwhelming them. Whilst some people escape to the South of France at the approach of winter, I always try to slip away at the first heralding of spring, and leave this country for either the clear hard

winters of the North or some Eastern land where summer is already flaunting her crimson banner.

If only I could thus have easily escaped from my youth, and shortened or abolished those troubled times that precede and follow one's twentieth year, to plunge on leaving school into a deep lethargy that could have been shaken off as I was nearing thirty ! For at thirty, Life's path, although its mortal ending cannot yet be discerned, spreads out to right or left, and has determined and revealed its direction. Whereas on leaving school, all roads stretch out before one, and all are equally desirable—the wish to live, to know and possess, radiate like the beams of a lighthouse—later on, the narrowing of choice marks the road that must be followed, the big hopes are ended and dispersed, and experience has fined down all that remains of projects and ambitions till they pass easily through the sieve of reality.

The road thus opening out before me was destined to lead me through a sterile region, but still to-day, after undergoing the test and having been broken by it, I prefer that full and tragical stage to the stormy and empty one of my youth.

If I dwelt overlong on my childhood, it is because the memory of it is somewhat precious to me, but I shall feel no such temptation to linger over my youth, whose recollection is

loathsome to me. The ten-year stretch lying between my degree and my twenty-eighth year can only be likened to those ghastly times when the head of a hitherto-prosperous business finds himself day by day slipping towards bankruptcy.

I dipped deeply into the fortune that my father's premature death had brought me, but the loss of money is nothing when compared to the cost of having surrendered one's curiosity for learning and taste for work, still more the cost of having wasted—and in the most vulgar adventures—the treasure of Love's virtue so patiently and ardently enriched during boyhood at those feverish conversations held with Robert Moret. It were both a useless and an unwelcome task to recall the memories of that sinister spring of mine and one that I refuse to undertake, except in brief. A young man of attractive appearance, good manners and plenty of money, pays a few fees to the Faculty of Law, tries to enter the School of Political Science but drops out before starting the primary examinations, and finally makes up his mind to enjoy life as the idle do. A few trips and travels, soon confined to those seasonal ones between the places where folk of like idleness congregate, and then—women! That impersonal expression, "Women" has always been repugnant to me, but yet it is characteristic of the sentimental life I was leading in those days. To

be sure, I indulged in no low debauches, but apart from that, I never preferred one woman to another, and merely relied on the hazard of the occasion, that one does not even take the trouble to seek, but that is always welcome if tempting. My relations with the opposite sex were based in the ordinary way on the same plan as the pleasure afforded by a good meal, or (and it was the happy exception) the enjoyment of a good play. I treated women in effect as I did my meals, the theatre, the arts or sport. So I went on, at first giving myself the excuse that it was only a temporary measure, that my youth and new-found liberty justified a few strayings from the narrow path; persuaded, as my elders never tired of telling me, that I should soon have had enough of it, and awaiting the first signs of satiety to reorganize my life. Satiety came indeed, sooner even than I had been led to expect, but too late for my weakened will to put up a fight. Yesterday was followed by to-morrow, and each fresh day of an existence that had ceased to bring me any real pleasure, rendered me less capable of pulling myself together. I developed into a young man of a very usual type, having lost the sole speciality that distinguished me from others, one that I fear I have ill-explained while telling over my boyhood's hopes—that sort of practical romanticism that, denying the pretended devilish fatality of love, restored it to the front

rank of desirable joys and reached out towards it by a conscious effort of will, just as others have a leaning towards the conquest of power or money,

If the reader I have chosen has not already thrown away these humble sheets, I feel that he is beginning to ask himself and also me :

“ And Robert Moret, what became of him ? ”

I had certainly deserved to lose this friend of mine through the mad existence I was leading and my dastardly betrayal of our common ambitions, but a maliciously kindly Fate willed otherwise. Robert remained at College two years after I had left, in the class where candidates for the Training-School were prepared, and passing fifth in the Literary Section, had the satisfaction of knowing that three more years of school life lay before him at the Rue Ulm. All the holidays and vacations he received during that time he spent in my company, for life in the Rue Ulm had enabled him to keep up his studious school habits, so that his mind developed harmoniously, and likewise caused mine temporarily to revert to a condition of other days and become absorbed once more in the great desires of our youth. This was, however, but a passing spasm, and well he knew it. Like several of his school friends, as he assured me, he had nothing to do with any woman, and it seemed to me that the desire we had formed together at school—to win a great love and

through its medium attain Life's very object—was assuming more and more a mystic form and becoming a form of religion to him. In parallel with this, his mind was developing with increasing power and his name was beginning to be mentioned in that milieu that was capable of understanding and appreciating him, though he only passed third in his final examinations. He had already made up his mind to request a holiday without pay, as soon as he left the school, a thing very easy to obtain at that time (three years before the War).

“I've got seven thousand francs of my own that my poor mother left me,” he told me, “and if I give private lessons for about ten hours a week, that should work out at four hundred francs a month. In that way I calculate I can make my little capital last out about five years, and those five years are absolutely essential to me for my own work. After that we shall see, but I suppose the Alma Mater will open her arms to me once more, if the need arises.”

I begged him to come and live with me, but this he refused.

“No, old man, no, indeed! If I were hard up, I can assure you that I should come and live with you at your expense without the slightest scruple, but since I can manage to earn my board and keep, things are better as they are. Besides, your social standing and way of

living are utterly different from mine. You would worry me and I should embarrass you, so let's go on as we are, and remain good pals just the same."

It came about as he suggested, for not only the dissipation in my life as opposed to the asceticism in his, made no alteration in our friendship, but I can truthfully say that that friendship grew greater from the time he left the Training-School, with no more courses to follow and no more examinations to pass, and took a bachelor's flat in the Rue Hautefeuille, that he furnished principally with bookshelves, and where he lived free and alone. Rarely two days elapsed without our meeting, which resulted, so far as I was concerned, if not in an actual conversion to a studious and straight life, at least in the comfort of hoping for and seeing the end of the dull years I had been passing through. Robert in no way ever ventured to censure my conduct, being well aware that I was acquainted with my failings, but merely remarked once, in the candid speech we used to each other :

"Of course you disgust me, and I consider the folks you mix with—men and women alike—are worse than useless, but I'm not worrying, because I'm sure you won't end your days with them. Go on sowing your wild oats, my Prodigal Son"; or else he would say, "Do you remember that passage in Heinrich Heine

where, speaking about Gottingen, he remarks that it's a town of ' three thousand inhabitants, amongst whom there are a few souls as well ' ? Well then, in the clique that comprises yourself and your dear male and female companions, there are likewise a few souls, yourself for example."

I do not think that even the near and constant influence of this strong mind and great heart would have sufficed to reclaim me, for even Saint Augustine writing of his years of sin, says, *Petebam castitatem, et timebam obtinere*, I asked God for chastity that I was afraid to receive. And I, like that illustrious sinner, if I occasionally dreamed of a life like Robert's, my taste for idleness and pleasure would recall me to the futile reality, to the pleasant monotony of shallow desires that were always gratified. I was beginning to realize with shame and relief that Robert seemed to be relaxing all moral ascendancy over me, when an event occurred that altered everyone's life at a blow, and mine among others, the War.

Here I should feel a certain amount of embarrassment, as if I were writing this story for the public, for many ordinary people and several writers assure me that one should refrain from speaking of the War nowadays, since everyone is absolutely sick to death of it. Well, so be it ! We will draw a convenient veil over the annoying past—publicly, but as I am writing a con-



fession or an observation, whichever you may care to call it, and certainly not a novel, I feel compelled to remark that the War did exist for me and for Robert too, and that it exerted an influence over both our lives, but especially over mine.

The War was the realization of life for millions of young human beings in France and elsewhere during five whole years, and to Robert Moret and Antoine Hermanault it was a daily reality dating from the spring of 1915. After being separated at the beginning—he going to the Somme front and I to the Eastern frontier—I succeeded, by using the little influence I possessed, in joining him in the same infantry company in the Argonne. To those contemporaries who cry their satiety when the War is mentioned to them, and to the younger generation who pay no heed to it, I can give my assurance, based on personal experience, that there actually was a War! The trenches, barbed wire entanglements, bombing of sectors, poison gas, torn limbs, scattered brains, gaping wounds, blood and death—all these were not mere inventions of the newspapers or the figments of a romance. Nor was that willing self-denial or stoical self-sacrifice of the martyrs who underwent all the above, fiction either. The physical recovery made by many weaklings and neurasthenics under that dreadful test, was as much a reality as was the moral exhaustion caused by

the ever-present danger of death ; *salutaris est reputatio mortis* ! Likewise the general heroism and sacrifice of individual life, not only for the nation but for the lives of others, were by no means fairy-tales, for it is a known fact that peaceful lawyer's clerks set light to a mine that was to blow them up themselves, that others threw themselves in front of their company officer to receive a mortal wound in his stead, whilst there were *poilus* who went out through a storm of machine-gun fire to bring in a wounded comrade from the wire where his Calvary was about to begin. To that at least I can personally vouch, for I was myself trapped and wounded in the wire in the Vienne-le-Château sector on September 26th, 1916, and the private soldier who came to my rescue was Robert Moret. However, let us pass on, for it appears that it is a deadly sin even to speak of the War for an instant now.

Let us pass on therefore to the end of the winter of 1919, when Robert and I were both demobilized on the same day. Robert had gone through the most appalling dangers without a scratch, his only relic of the War, so far as his health was concerned, being a chronic form of tonsillitis that he treated with disdain, whilst I had recovered from two head wounds without an operation or any ill-effects, except for a general debility that it would take long months to cure. Robert agreed to live with me during

those first weeks of freedom while we gradually reconstructed what Goethe calls the friendly habits of life.

My friend's presence saved me from that mad rush into amusement that carried away my contemporaries after the conclusion of the Armistice, and which would have been doubly dangerous for me in the state of health I was then in. He, not having yet restarted his work, was contemplating the difficulties that fresh and threatening economical conditions were about to impose on the hermit's life he was wont to lead.

"My dear old man," said he to me, about the time when Paris was emptying at the close of the spring of 1920, "I'm not a bit satisfied with the pair of us, for we're letting ourselves be swept away by this general wave of indolence. I'm not working, and you naturally are doing nothing."

"I can't do anything."

"Shut up, Sluggard! To-morrow as ever is, you're going to accept that post in the service of the League of Nations you've been talking about." (This was quite true, for a Political Personage, with whom I had shared the same room when we were lying wounded in hospital, was insisting on taking me to Berne with him.)

"And I too, am going to be out of this country for some time."

"Where are you thinking of going to?"

"A little while ago I received a letter from my old chief in the Rue Ulm, offering me a position as lecturer in a University, but it's a very long way off, in Norway."

"In Norway, eh?"

"Yes, in Norway; an excellent country, and moreover a neutral country, where people have been living in peace during these last years of Hell, and consequently where there's no difficult adjustment to post-War life as there is here, no frenzy of dancing and eating and no wave of idleness, but a splendid place to restore one's mental outlook. In any case, between you and me, it's vastly preferable to starvation. Oh, I know what you're going to say, that you would offer to go on keeping me, but I'm not going even to think of accepting. Now listen to me, old man! Let each of us go our own way for a bit, and see a little of a neutral country, for there we shall learn and understand many things that the fog of War has hidden from our eyes. You will escape from the mad holiday-making that lies in wait for you here, that's worse than anything before Charleroi's time, composed as it is of adventurers and new rich who would send you off your head and break up your health hopelessly. I shall try and pick up the thread of my thoughts that got broken somewhere in the Argonne."

The very wisdom of these suggestions found a natural echo in me, for I was suffering, like

Robert, from the boredom, the weariness and fear of Paris. Doubtless, I should make the young post-War generation smile if I assured them that a violent desire to raise the level of our lives animated both of us during the last few days we spent together. And yet there was nothing ridiculous about these two men who had been fond of each other from childhood, who had dreamed together of a morally high sentimental and intellectual destiny that the War had damaged and set back. One of them owed his life to the other, and both desired at all costs, by escaping from a poisoned atmosphere, to avoid that weakness that follows protracted effort and live a life worthy the name, during the time they still had to live, after the five years of youth the War had snatched from them.

I had but one objection to oppose to Robert's plan, and I felt it was my duty to utter it.

"And your health? Aren't you nervous about it, in that chilly atmosphere?"

As I had occasion to mention just now, Robert, whom his College and Training-School companions had always considered as a sort of Hercules, had been experiencing a weird soreness about the throat since his return to civil life, and his left tonsil would suddenly become uncomfortable or painful. This feeling would last for a few hours—at the outside a night and

a day—and then go off and disappear a long enough time for him to forget all about it, but after a while it would all return again. Usually when I begged him to see a doctor, he would refuse with scorn, but this time I felt that I ought to press the point.

“Anyway, have yourself examined before you go.”

He promised he would, but did nothing in the matter, and besides, during those warm weeks in June when we were each of us completing our preparations, he was better than he had been for ages.

It pleased us to leave Paris on the same day and by the same train, and on the station platform at Geneva where our roads divided, we felt once again how closely our hearts and minds were linked together and dependent on each other.

As for me, when I thought of the restless post-War Paris I was leaving behind me, I realized that Robert had saved my life a second time.



### III

THERE are certain people of austere habits who make a great parade of their chastity and expect praise for it. I feel pity for the debauched, but for those who make a profession of their continence my admiration is always deeply tinged with scepticism.

The reason for this is that I have proved in my own case how greatly virtue varies with one's state of health. My wounds and war weariness had left me with my body tired, overworked and delicate ; a distinct contrast to the untirable loungeur I had been previous to 1914, when a few extra hours of sleep in the morning would set me up again after a couple of nights out. Leading a studious and chaste existence in a dreary Swiss town where there was no kind of amusement whatsoever cost me no very great effort, tired as I was of the life of pleasure,

whereas on the other hand, I experienced that rested feeling that I really needed. The work entrusted to me was not without interest, and I easily adapted myself to it, and realized that I was doing well at it. I scarcely made any acquaintances outside a narrow diplomatic circle to which no worldly or sentimental frivolity had access, and it gave me great pleasure to write about my reformed life and virtuous renaissance to Robert Moret, who had by now settled down in his northern exile. His reply held a certain amount of praise, but his perspicacity caused him to add :

“Make the most of the present truce, but I shall expect to see you when you have recovered all your strength and when your temperament is once more at grips with your virtue.”

I could not help noticing also that his letters were becoming more and more reticent on that subject of chastity which he had always been willing enough to discuss before, as though the question had ceased to interest him, but instead, he wrote at some length of his new position, which he was very satisfied with, and emphasized the fact that his health was excellent.

“I am completely cured of my ridiculous complaint,” were his words.

Thanks to the depreciation of the franc that was already becoming serious, he was getting what amounted to a school-inspector's salary, his lectures were being followed by a numerous



and attentive audience, and finally—and this was the most important item in his opinion—he had resumed his own work with such ardour that he was even devoting his 1920 holidays to that purpose. I can neither name nor define the nature of the work he was engaged upon, in this confession, without betraying the anonymity with which I wish to cover my story, but I may say that its first results, published in 1922, were the foundation stones of his fame among specialists in his branch of learning, and I can only compare his brilliant *début* to that of Henri Poincaré. But I am anticipating. We must respect the chronological order of things as they occurred.

About the commencement of the autumn of 1920, I had regained the whole of my pre-War health and strength, and yet—in spite of all Robert's apprehensions—I felt no inclination whatsoever to return to Paris and its fierce pleasures. Enjoying a slowly regained balance, I devoted the firstfruits of my newly acquired strength to sports that were held in great esteem in the milieu I frequented. I found my work very agreeable, and was even considering profiting by the leisure time it left me and the notes I had gradually amassed, by collaborating on a well-known political review where my assistance had been requested. I had not seen Robert since our parting at Geneva about eighteen months before, and was thinking of shortly

paying him a visit in the University town where he was working (for he had himself told me, "If you want to see this country, come in the winter time."), but just before starting on this holiday, whilst I was busy making my preparations for the journey and setting in order the business I was engaged on, I received the following letter from him :

MY DEAR ANTOINE,

Don't start, for I'm coming to you.

Four months ago there occurred an event in my life which I've told you nothing of as yet.

You must not blame our friendship if I lacked frankness over this matter, for to begin with, my confiding in you did not depend on myself alone, and moreover concerned that mysterious order of sentimental life that was the subject of so many of our school discussions, our conversations as we grew older, and even those long talks we used to indulge in as soldiers in the dug-outs at Vienne-le-Château. One can easily write about these matters when the subject of the conversation is impersonal, but I find that it is no longer possible to do so when the subject takes definite shape. For that, one requires the security of a tête-à-tête with one's friend and the encouragement of his looks and words.

That's why I'm coming to see you, my

dear old Antoine. My happiness is so great that it has cast from my desires all ambition that does not contain that happiness. It is all that I require, and I want nothing else, and moreover, nothing else can well exist beside it save my work and your friendship. I'm quite aware that what I'm writing must seem very confused, but what matter, since I shall be with you in three days and you will then see and know everything?

Please come and ask for me about eleven o'clock next Thursday at the Hotel Metropole at Geneva. I shall be expecting you.

My greatest hope is that my happiness may bring happiness to you as well.

R.

P.S.—Bring a suitcase with you. I want you to stay for a bit.

At the agreed hour on the following Thursday a hotel servant took me up to a comfortable little sitting-room on the second floor of the Hotel Metropole, where he left me, and I spent the three or four minutes I had to wait looking out of one of the windows at the colours of the trees on the quays below that were already half-stripped of their foliage by September, and the Lake that was all hazy with mist. The brief respite was welcome to me, for I was more moved than the occasion seemed to call for. Through the communication door leading to

the next room I could hear voices talking in low tones, but could not make out whether one of them were Robert's until the door opened and he appeared and folded me in his arms.

"Sit down," said he, leading me to a chair with both hands, "and let me have a look at you. Good! Fresh colour, clear eye and sound chest, and something indefinable about you of balance and repose! My dear old man, you just can't imagine how relieved I feel! That was the only thing I was really worrying about."

Whilst he was speaking and still holding my hands in his, I, too, was looking at him and taking him in bit by bit as one does a close friend after a long parting. I could not truthfully take it upon myself to return his compliments on his looks, for the rugged beauty of his features had fined down as though under the influence of some inside absorption and his gaze was as though veiled, but it was his bearing especially that seemed different to me. I am not sure if I shall make myself clearly understood when I say that it was at once triumphant and shy, but so it was, however. His look was less striking and less spiritual than before but more human, and at the same time, he did not appear quite at ease with me. His speech was hesitant, his gestures vague, and I felt that he had difficulty in looking me in the eye, but his emotion calmed mine, with a reactionary effect I have often observed.

"Tell me all about this happiness of yours," said I. "You must realize of course that I've guessed its meaning."

The story he then related to me at some length could have been set forth in a very few words. He had fallen in love with one of his students and carried her off, but the very circumstances of the case robbed it of much of the usual banality, for to begin with the girl was free and the whole of her family had vanished in the revolutionary outbreak that had devastated the neighbouring country where her father had been a wholesale dealer in cloth. She alone, assisted by the night-watchman of the warehouse, an astute and devoted servant to the family, had succeeded in making her escape taking a few valuables with her, but not without ten times over incurring the danger of imprisonment, rape and death. Once over the frontier, the two fugitives had been gathered in by charitable associations organized for that purpose, and the watchman had soon found employment, whilst the girl had settled down in the University town where Robert was lecturing, once she had recovered from her terrible experiences. Living on her small capital that was composed of the price she had received from the sale of her jewellery, she had concluded the medical studies commenced in her native land and had just taken her degree as a doctor.

"She's twenty-three," continued Robert,

"and her name is Sophie Raynal. Perhaps the French name surprises you, but of course the one she bore had a local sound and like all else recalling her own country, used to fill her with horror. I daresay you understand. She has had what physiologists call a nervous shock, so when you see her, be careful to speak of the past as little as possible. Apart from that, the name of Raynal was borne by one of her grandparents, for the cloth merchant's family was of French, or rather Franco-Jewish, origin, converted to orthodoxy about a century ago. Sophie herself is neither Jewish nor orthodox, but distinctly and resolutely positivist."

I listened to all these matters with a certain embarrassment which I compelled myself to dissimulate in immobility and silence, for Robert's adventure both surprised and worried me. During the eighteen months I had spent in Switzerland how many of these refugees from the Russian Hell, let loose on Western Europe, had I not seen pass before me and even hover round me! This was by no means the first case of Franco-Israelitish origin that had come to my notice, nor was it the first camouflaged name I had heard.

Robert at last was silent and it was my turn to speak.

"Are you married?" I asked him.

"Sophie considers that we are, and it is her desire that things should remain in their present

state," he replied, and then after a moment's hesitation and with an embarrassed smile he added, "There is one more thing, and I should be glad if you would not be the first to allude to it. We are registered here in the names of 'Monsieur and Madame Moret' and Sophie is going to use my name in future."

Here followed another spell of rather constrained silence and then :

"After all this preliminary, please don't expect to find yourself meeting a Revolutionary, for she's seen anarchy too close up for that, but sticks to her own ideas ; and so far as I'm concerned, you must doubtless remember the formula our student meditations led us to ?"

"Quite. Freedom of conscience and thoughts."

"Well, there you are. Now, you'll lunch with us, won't you, for I've got a good table reserved, facing the Lake. Stay here for a second while I go and fetch my wife."





#### IV

I SHALL presently explain why I slept at the Hotel Metropole on the night of that memorable Thursday, but as it is no question here of composing a well-balanced narrative, I have a feeling that I shall get on better with this confession of mine if I note what were my impressions and thoughts on the evening of that same day, after I had closed my bedroom door. I had spent the evening with Robert and Sophie in the most unromantic fashion by going to a cinema in the town. The night was dark and mild, so I dallied some while on the little balcony in front of my window smoking cigarettes and reviewing the events of the day. These were all of such a very simple nature, just as had been the evening we had passed together at the 'Pictures.' First had come our luncheon party in the hotel restaurant and afterwards, understanding Robert's



desire rapidly to establish feelings of comradeship between myself and the woman he called his wife, I had agreed to accompany them to Evian where they thought of taking tea. This excursion had occupied the whole of the afternoon, and we had only got back to Geneva just in time to change for dinner, so that when we separated on our return from the cinema, I had had occasion and leisure to look at, study and listen to, if not yet to judge, this stranger who had so suddenly installed herself as mistress in the life of the only being I cared for.

My first conversation with Robert in their little sitting-room at the hotel had scarcely prepared me to feel kindly towards her, but I know what life is, and the desire not to spoil my friend's happiness controlled my attitude. Besides, they are very presumptuous who claim that they can judge or see through a human being at the first glance, for the thing is out of the question, or rather the first impression received is so certain to be corrected by later ones that it is only a confused and often deceptive reflection of a person's true character.

"A splendid model!" was the impression I received on first seeing her, but it was already slightly altered by the end of lunch, when, silent and attentive, she was listening to Robert and myself calling up recollections of school and war. Neither the structure of her body nor her facial features held anything of what painters

term arresting. The Eastern shape of the cheek-bones was scarcely perceptible in a regular mask that reminded me of the Eve on the Medici Tomb greatly rejuvenated, although Sophie did not look a day older than her twenty-three years. All her features were pure, without being fine, and lacking that thinness that makes for the charm and value of so many Western faces in which we do not seek real beauty. The one thing that struck me as remarkable was her hair, of a deep blonde colour. I can find no other words to describe those tresses, as heavy as the ones to be seen sculptured on statues, that she wore parted over her forehead in contempt of the prevailing fashion, and whose colour seemed latent indoors, only revealing its marvellous lights in the clear daylight of the open. As to her eyes, that were of regular shape like all the lines of her face, they were of the usual Eastern colouring—pupils where there was some grey, blue and a little brown as well. I was not to know them really perfectly until later, for the light in those eyes were hidden, too, just as was the sheen in her hair.

My second opinion of her was, “ Beautiful, but strikingly foreign, and wretchedly dressed naturally ! That dreadful grey jersey ! Anyway, a couple of months in Paris will set all that right ! ”

The moral impression I had received at the

very start and that was confirmed during our meal together, was on the other hand very favourable in spite of my premonitions. When Sophie spoke, she looked one straight in the eyes without the frankness of her gaze appearing affected or even assumed. She expressed herself in French as well as we ourselves could, only here and there setting an unusual tonic accent on certain syllables. Naturally the first remarks we exchanged were of a somewhat conventional nature, despite Robert's efforts to bridge the gulf, but by the end of lunch that we all did justice to, embarrassment had vanished, and it seemed to me that the lady was satisfied with her estimate of me. No doubt the thought, "He won't come between Robert and me," was beginning to run through her mind at the same time as the one, "She is not likely to separate such old friends as Robert and myself" was passing through mine. I was already of the conviction that she was intelligent, but apart from the scholastic intelligence that she displayed without overmuch pedantry, I was not sure yet that she possessed that true intelligence that enables its owner to grasp the drift of things by the horns, instead of receiving and co-ordinating the acquisitions of other intelligences. After lunch she went up to her room on the pretext of resting before the excursion we had planned, but I could have sworn that it was to leave Robert and myself free to have

an intimate conversation. Robert followed her with his eyes until she had vanished from the room, and then putting down the cigar he had been smoking, he asked in a voice he vainly tried to render steady :

“ Well ? ”

I felt that he would be disappointed if I had answered him with some commonplace adjective such as “ charming,” “ exquisite,” or the like, so I merely replied :

“ My dear fellow, I must confess that when you told me . . . Good Lord ! I didn’t understand things and I was rather afraid of you. I understand now and I’m not afraid any longer. There ! ”

He appeared transported with joy at my modest opinion, and said, as he took my hand in both of his and pressed it to his heart, “ Well, I’m glad, yes, very glad. I want you to be fond of her just as you are of me. She’s no ordinary person, for never have I met so sturdy a conscience, nor one of as sound a metal that rings so true. No, never, never ! The most firmly rooted moral or social conventions have no weight with her, if they seem to her to sin against reason. I know, not only from her own lips but from others who knew her, that before our coming together, she had never tolerated a man’s touch, even on her hand, in love ; and yet on the day I gave her to understand that I loved her, she said to

me, "I know that you love me and I want to be all yours!"

We went on talking of her until she came in to find us and tell us that the car was waiting for us in front of the hotel.

Sophie had not changed her dress, and the simple straw hat she was wearing did not bear the cachet of Paris, but she was one of those fortunate beings who are perfectly natural and gain by exposure to strong light and fresh air without the aid of artificial colours or make-up of any sort. I watched the effect of her on a group of German-looking travellers who were just arriving at the hotel, heard the exclamations of "*Wunderschoen!*" uttered in loud tones, and was amused at the attitude of two pink-visaged youths wearing green Tyrolese hats with the usual feathers, who stood insolently in the doorway staring at her until the car drove off.

"My dear old Antoine," exclaimed Robert, seated opposite Sophie and me who were sharing the back seat, "you can't imagine how pleased I am! You needn't think I'm going to let you go this evening or to-morrow either for the matter of that."

I, too, was content, seeing that the unforeseen and strange adventure that I had dropped into but a few hours ago was going along smoothly and leading to the most easy accord between the three of us. The stranger herself was feeling

the benefit of this, for, without surrendering her calm attitude, she was beginning to talk more freely and to smile on occasions. That September day, beautiful as summer and fresh as spring, was spreading over us the friendly atmosphere of a mild season in a temperate climate. Robert aptly described it as "the very weather of life," and indeed it was one of those days when light seems to caress and when breathing is a gentle and constant pleasure. Only on our return journey, as dusk began to fall, a rather sharp breeze commenced to blow from the Lake, and we had to have the hood of the car put up. Robert stopped talking and tied a silk scarf round his neck, fearing the effect of the chilly air on his throat, but Sophie and I went on chatting, and in her questions concerning life in that Paris she was ignorant of and where she was going to live, I guessed at the picture that Robert's talk, distorted by her woman's imagination, had drawn of me—a worldly person, mad on women, pouring out his fortune and his intelligence without profit to himself or anyone else. Whilst not appearing to be displeasing to her, I felt that I filled her with a kind of protective pity for me, such as she must have formerly experienced for the more dissipated of her fellow-students.

Dinner and our trip to the cinema set a seal upon our understanding and added, so far as I was concerned, a weird impression of—how

shall I put it?—getting somewhere, of security and also of comfort that my life in Robert's company alone had never brought me. I had agreed to stay on at Geneva with them for at least the whole of the following day and that prospect by no means displeased me, as I told myself while smoking one cigarette after the other, leaning over the balcony outside my room. Yes, a sort of middle-class comfort, made up of and controlled by the presence of a fair-haired simple woman, who was neither coquettish nor talkative, but studious and calm, and who differed from the majority of the women I knew in one respect—that I was not compelled to pay court to her. What a relief, and how tired I was of having so often to make sacrifice to that ridiculous convention! What toil, what laboriously witty letters and sentences I had penned with a view to getting things that in reality I so little desired!

“Here indeed,” thought I to myself, “is a woman whom I can find beautiful, whom I can look at and talk to with pleasure—and this woman, over and above the fact that her nature is very evidently straight and sincere, belongs to my dearest friend, which *ipso facto* forbids all attempt at gallantry on my part; forbids it me and, thank Heavens! relieves me of the necessity for it.”

“Altogether,” I concluded, throwing away the end of my last cigarette, “things might have

turned out far worse than they have done. He is passionately in love with her, and she is an attentive and faithful companion to him. Does she love him as a young French wife would love her husband? I should feel inclined to answer "No" to that question, and that is pure guess-work. A Parisian like myself possesses no key to these Northern locks, and this particular one seems unusually hard to pick."

I went to bed in joyous humour, and whilst waiting for the sleep that was not long in coming, I recalled in the same optimistic and amused spirit, those expressions of the strange woman that had rather taken me aback when Sophie had uttered them with such serenity. Such sentences as "When I gave my virginity to Robert . . ." and axioms like, "No one has the right to take life"; and then the story she recounted, that was really rather fascinating and not lacking in poetry, of one of her girlhood's friends who, being utterly tired of life, had climbed a glacier carrying with her a bottle of chloral, and who, lying down in a crevasse, had taken a fatal dose and slipped off into her everlasting sleep where she lay, in order that the first fall of snow might cover her up. Sophie had expressed great admiration for that immaculate death.





## V

I WAS just finishing dressing on the following morning when Robert came into my room. He had always been used to getting up earlier in the morning than I had, and if he was always very neat in his person and his clothes, it was only in his mind that he deigned to be refined.

"How are you feeling?" I enquired. "When we parted last night, your throat was giving you a bit of trouble."

"That was nothing, thanks to Sophie. Did I tell you that she cured me where garglings and pulverizations were useless? Just three drops of a solution of heroin, a formula she made up on purpose, and I'm soothed and go off to sleep like a child."

"Is she thinking of practising medicine in spite of your union?"

"As to that, we shall see, but in any case she

will certainly not stop working ; and that reminds me that I had no chance yesterday to speak about our schemes to you. How pleasant yesterday was and how well we got on together, didn't we ? To-day we'll go to Lusanne and Montreux if that idea is agreeable to you ? But to come back to our schemes. We propose to stay here as long as this delightful weather lasts, and you with us of course . . ."

"But . . ." I interrupted.

"There are no buts. You told me yourself that you hadn't had leave since your appointment and that you were entitled to four months. We will therefore, all three of us, stay here as long as the fine weather holds, but Sophie, who knows the region, will not allow me to remain once the rains start, for this is too damp a climate. It's an astonishing fact, isn't it, that whilst the winters of the North with their ice and sunshine, did me nothing but good, this dampness is my deadly enemy. Afterwards we will go South to the blue Mediterranean and maybe to the African coast, for I'm rich now, old Antoine, and I've piled up a heap of florins, each of which is worth a louis in our wretched French currency at the present time. I only hope that they will last us until after the winter, for then will come our return to Paris, settling-in the publication of the first two volumes of my work, the beginning of Sophie's practice . . ."

"And the birth of a little Moret," I interrupted.

"As a matter of fact, I hope that it will be a girl," replied Robert in high good humour, "but anyway . . . Good Lord! we're not in such a hurry. Now, what do you think of my plans?"

"I should say, to quote the language of the best people nowadays, that you are proposing to 'drop' me until the spring comes."

"On the contrary, I hope that you won't leave us. Sophie and I were discussing the matter just now and she is entirely of my opinion, and Paris is no good to you."

"Quite, but my work lies at Berne and not at Paris, though I know there is some question of its transfer to the Quai d'Orsay."

"That's been settled already, as you will see in the copy of the *Temps* I've brought you to read. Page two: Foreign Affairs. The transfer will be effected on November 15th."

"Then I shall certainly be compelled to reside in Paris."

"Not at all. You will get yourself put on the unattached list, which is the normal state of the officials in your department, and I can assure you that 'Universal Peace' will not be delayed one single day by your action."

"I can't promise anything . . ."

"There's no need to. We're going to keep you, all the same."

In the writing-room of the hotel where Robert was penning a letter to his editor later in the day, Sophie insisted in her turn :

"If you really do care for your friend," she told me, "you will give him the pleasure of keeping you with him for some time."

I shall never be able to forget the look in those big eyes of hers, which seemed almost blue that day, as they held mine while she spoke those words. We were sitting on two chairs close to each other in the vast room at the other end of which Robert, with his back turned to us, was bent over the letter he was inditing, but too far away from us to hear what we were talking about.

"But," I stammered, "is his health really . . ."

"He needs to be extremely prudent and must be carefully looked after."

Then it was that I noticed the immobility of her gaze for the first time, and what an extraordinary feature it was. Whilst the whole of her person and the features of her face were certainly calm, her lips moving slightly and her hands making few if any gestures, the pupils of her eyes were quite still nor did the lids flicker. It was just as though her gaze had its secret life quite independent from the life that dwelled in her lovely face or shapely body.

Being now thoroughly alarmed, I asked her, "You surely don't feel anxious about him?"

I was sorry I had asked the question immediately I had done so, for whereas my companion's face remained impassive, a silence that seemed to me intolerable was the only answer she vouchsafed me. I was to learn in due season that such abrupt questions brought real physical pain to Sophie.

"Forgive me," I muttered, but she remained silent and at that moment Robert got up from where he was sitting, stamped his letter, and came over in our direction.

I shall not weary my reader with a day-to-day recital of this singular period of my life, one of the happiest I have experienced. When I try to fathom out what really constituted my happiness, I clearly realize the part played by the constant presence of a really dear friend, whose mind was an inexhaustible source of joy to mine, but this was merely the recurrence of a known happiness and not the cause of this kind of moral festiveness—feeling that one was living through every hour and every second, instead of just letting life glide by ; feeling the full strength of all one's senses in activity and ready to sample the Universe. A dream of well-being comparable to that produced by the action of certain drugs, they say ; a happiness that only the presence of a woman can bring to men of my sort—a confession I make with all humility—but, and herein lies the miracle, this fervent joy was not marred by any kind of

desire. The chaste man that the bruising of War had made of me remained chaste, and I was not even touched by a temptation that I should certainly have rejected with scorn. Sophie's presence brought me happiness, but I had no thought of desiring her presence for myself alone, for it suited me that Robert should share it. It may seem strange that I should confess that Robert's attraction had redoubled for me, and it was to him that I was grateful for my happiness.

The reader may point out that I should have foreseen the instability of such a state of affairs, but this is not so, for to employ an apt expression attributed to Hugo when he was seventy years of age, "Nature gave me no warning." When Sophie was absent, a kind of nervous and anxious feeling would come over me, but I was soothed as soon as she put in an appearance, and every evening I would accompany this couple whose life of love I felt not the least trace of envy for, to the door of their bedroom without the slightest emotion.

And she? This woman essentially foreign in features, dress and get-up, ideas and expression, revealed herself to me, in my daily intercourse with her, as simple, friendly, discreet and modest, in no way provoking and by no means "fatal." She employed no turns of speech, nor was there about her any attitude of dissimulation nor anything secret; only, apart from what

she expressed or showed of herself, *it was impossible to discover anything*. Her mind was a closed book, of which all that could be seen was the cover and the page it pleased her to open at ; the lock shut firmly and she alone possessed the key to it. After studying her thoroughly, it seemed to me that this was the reason for the stability of her features (especially for that quasi-immobility of the eyes that I have mentioned) and for the ever harmonious and constant rhythm of her voice and gestures.

Shortly, as I shall relate, I was to see her in prey to violent emotion, but silent under it all ; the tears she was to shed were not to disturb the balance of her personality, but to adjust themselves to it, and the fresh equilibrium thus attained was to be scarcely more revealing than the former.

In view of this, I could only make conjectures as to her feelings towards me, and my theory at the time was that, like myself, she realized the value of our friendship, that she looked upon me as I did her, and the pleasure she found in my company was quite of the brotherly type. A goodly number of women—some of whom were thoroughly good, and others, women who had long since renounced all idea of love—have assured me that from my person, my voice and my way of treating them, there emanates a singular influence, neither perverse nor yet sensual but pleasing to them,

that urges them on to talk, smile and seize at the charm of the passing hours. One of them thus expressed her meaning to me, "When I am with you I experience the pleasure of being a woman." Well, then, I had a feeling that when Sophie was in my company, she felt glad to be a woman, without making any efforts to that end, and perhaps she was experiencing that feeling for the first time in her life.

\* \* \* \*

Stage by stage, the noble countryside towards Montpellier had beckoned us, but there we were halted by a sudden and unfortunate incident, for on the day following a treacherous evening we had spent out at Peyrou, Robert was laid low with a violent fever, the trachea and the smaller bronchial tubes being congested. No doctor was allowed to get as far as his bedside, where Sophia attended him and where we both nursed him. She appeared to be in great fear lest the inflammation reach the larger bronchial tubes, and doubtless the stethoscope had revealed to her dangers of which I was ignorant and that probably Robert himself ignored as well. I was present at that affecting struggle—that could only be likened to the defence of a beleaguered town—between the doctor and the malady. During the first ten days she was uncertain of success, almost desperate indeed one



night, but thereafter convalescence dragged on until the end of October.

I know myself, I believe, my limits and my failings, and I am not, alas ! exempt from perversity, but I can find no trace of Sadism in the most secret recesses of my heart or feelings. Human pain hurts me, though unfortunately I cannot lay this to the credit of my compassion, for it is my egotism that is wounded. If therefore I confess that those three painful weeks dissipated the mirage of brotherhood that camouflaged my friendship for Sophie, it would be unjust to explain away this fact by Freud's methods, for the thing was much more simple.

From the trio we formed—Robert, Sophie and I—Robert suddenly faded out as active and possessive principal, and became a suffering thing, an object of tender solicitude. I found myself substituted for him in the rôle of support and male protector that the stranger woman needed, for like me she existed by Robert's side, but it was with me that she really lived, and an intimacy that grew hourly greater drew us together. My room was only now used by me for short and hastily-snatched naps, since my real room was Robert's and it was also Sophie's. There two beds stood side by side ; the sick man lay on one and the other was his mistress's. Obsessing as was the smell of drugs in the air, my nostrils were at times assailed by a subtler and more human odour that escaped from the

wardrobes where the stranger woman's clothes hung, the very breath of her womanhood, shut up with me in that stuffy hotel bedroom whose windows were only opened with great parsimony after sundown. There was a still more tyrannical anguish I was compelled to endure, and that was when Sophie, absolutely worn out and exhausted, would throw herself on the empty bed and immediately sink into a deep sleep, with only a nightdress over her chemise and her arms bare. On the neighbouring bed lay the invalid, who had been artificially soothed with potions and was breathing laboriously. All around me, in the hotel and outside, was asleep and I alone was alive, I alone saw and thought, and in the midst of that atmosphere of deadness my survival seemed to me as an incredible phenomenon. All human intelligence and lucidity seemed concentrated in my person and I imagined that I was at last worming my way into the innermost thoughts of the woman who lay there wrapped in sleep, those thoughts that were so pregnant with mystery for me when she was awake. I wondered whether the feeling that was coming over me was possessing her as well, and whether, after so many experiences, I had once again become so raw that my instinct was at fault over the symptoms of irresistible fascination. In opposition to our sincere wills, a force stronger than death was uniting us to each other, and those dismal days

and exhausting nights became very precious to us merely because we were hardly away from each other at all, and because our gaze and breath were constantly mingling. She said no word of this to me, nor did I even hint of it to her. That mutual confession should never pass the barrier of our lips. Of what use then to restrain my thoughts and rein in the emotion that was permeating the whole of my being since nothing could result from it? Ah, look at her, breathe her in! The greatest of all human emotions has returned to your body, that was out of action for a while but is fit again now. Poor fool! Presently the little you possess of her will be snatched from you, and in those twin beds occupied at this moment by a drugged invalid and a tired nurse, there will be two lovers preparing for the supreme caress. And as for you, you will no longer have even the right to cross the threshold of their room.

\* \* \* \*

I have said that I am a man of healthy and well-balanced mind, but the irradiation of communicable fever that vibrates in a sick-room had caused me to wander a little at times. In proportion as Robert's health improved and things began to resume their normal course, so also was I enabled to steady my mind and set it in order, analyse my feelings and realize matters.

Any further illusion was out of the question now. I was in love with my friend's mistress, and the progressive re-establishment of distances and absences between her and myself were becoming intolerable to me. In the single bedroom I had returned to, I found neither calm by day nor rest at night.

As to the woman I was in love with, I felt no wish to possess her, and I was confident that my will would not bend in that respect. Nothing, unless it were that prescience of the other's desire that one acquires from much contact with women, gave me any authority for believing that she reciprocated my love. She had freely given herself to my friend, considering herself to be his legal wife, and had just been tenderly nursing him. It was probable that she loved both of us, for the majority of women are liable to such dualism, but it was very certain that her own will as well would hinder her from betraying her man.

Quite apart from duty, it would be far less painful for me to go than stay, and my resolution was quickly and irrevocably taken. However, in problems of my daily life and especially in love affairs, either because I possess a deeper understanding than the average person or because I instinctively avoid brutal methods, I have always sought for solutions that do not involve either shocks or scenes, what I might term simple solutions, even if to attain them one

has to have recourse to what is called a 'white lie,' i.e., one that is useful and of friendly intent. While I was making up my mind to adopt this expedient, chance saved me and I was able to tell my friends the truth on the eve of leaving Montpellier for Nice, when I informed them, "I'm called back to Paris." The statesman who had dragged me out of my inertia and taken me into his department, was calling for me in pressing fashion, for preparations for a fresh conference of the Allies had broken abruptly into his own vacation. However, I knowingly twisted the truth when I added that my absence would be of short duration and that I should be rejoining the couple in Algeria in less than a month's time.

Robert was too delicate-minded and too grateful for the care with which I had ministered to him not to give in to the evident necessity for my departure.

"I'm very, very sorry," he told me, "but I quite realize that you must go. Only, please don't abandon me altogether."

I well remember that his words, although accompanied by a smile that was intended to rob them of their solemnity, echoed through my heart, and I still wonder to-day what he really meant. How much did he know, to make him fear that my departure was final?

Sophie was present when I broke the news to Robert, but as usual she betrayed nothing of

her true feelings, contenting herself with remarking in her quiet voice :

“ Antoine is right. He cannot refuse.”

We finally agreed that I should stay five more days with them, just sufficient time to accompany them to Nice and see them settled down there, but during those five days, Sophie and I had no chance of a tête-à-tête nor did we seek one. And yet through all those strenuous hours of night nursing we had spent together in the room at Montpellier, I had never felt myself closer to her nor more united to her. The real pair, as intended by Nature, and assented to by both Sophie and myself, was the two of us ; that I was convinced of and moreover, I was sure that she was of the same opinion. Had we not also noticed that alliance spontaneously guessed at in folks' minds when the three of us arrived anywhere, and the furtive signs of astonishment when the true order of our relationships became known ? Fortified by our common resolve not to fail and the certainty of imminent separation, I contented myself with that mute union. Was I lying to myself ? I do not really think so, but yet while I was firmly and sincerely telling myself, “ All is going to end here,” the instinct of love was protesting within me and murmuring, “ On the contrary, all is but starting.”

Our parting had nothing dramatic about it, and how should it, since it had been agreed

between the three of us that I should shortly rejoin them? Just as I was about to take my seat in the train, however, and had taken Robert in my arms, he murmured in my ear, " Kiss her as well ! " and so I kissed Sophie. That official and public contact moved not the slightest fibre in our beings, but rather embarrassed us and was as painful as sacrilege. She remained standing with her companion before the closed door of the carriage and I leaned out and said " Au revoir " to them as the train started. At that instant I saw a few tears trickle from Sophie's steady eyes down her motionless face, and they were so slow in their passage that I can even recollect their number. Ah, the sudden miracle of those tears ! I fell back gasping on my seat as the train gathered speed.





## VI

ON leaving school and being freed from its ties, I had been able to share in the wild adventures of my fellow students ; and later, as a well-to-do and unattached young bachelor, I had mixed a good deal with women and had often had occasion to play a hand in a game of love against them or rather with them, but despite all, I realized that I had in me nothing of the Don Juan or even of the voluptuary.

Throughout the fantasies, experiments or passages of love—call them what you will—I never belied the dreamy schoolboy who once upon a time on the playing-ground had come to an agreement with one of his companions to set up the hope of happiness, the very ambition of life, in a wonderful and unique kind of love, and that not merely through romantic feverishness but by a premeditated act of reason.



There is no doubt that when I got back to Paris and realized that I was to be separated from Sophie for an indefinite period, it was my haughty conception of love that prevented me from giving way to despair.

I have always been straight and honest in my dealings, for I possess—as Robert Moret once aptly described it—a ‘clean heart,’ and I felt that, quite apart from all ideas of duty, I had taken the right course out of a difficult situation. For this reason, miserable though my loneliness might be, I preferred it a hundred times to the sentimental *impasse* I was in before, for it was in this way that my boyhood’s vows were being ratified by me.

The object of our wonderful dream did not belong to me, but was no longer a theory or a figment of my imagination. She really existed, I had seen her, touched her and lived near her, and though by a malicious trick of fate, she belonged to my closest friend, yet she existed. Despite the Stygian darkness of the future, I felt that I was travelling along the path of my destiny and not lingering in the squares and public places where ordinary destinies meet and cross.

I should expect at this point to hear exclamations of surprise and incredulity from people reading this as they would a novel—“What next? Such complete conquest in a few weeks by a foreigner whose sole recommendation are

a model's looks and a scholastic intelligence ? That's comprehensible of the friend who taught her and shared in the building-up of her mind for months, the friend who by acclimatization had become more familiar with the spirit and the ways of the North, the friend who had studiously avoided women and brought more ingenuity into the adventure than his partner ! But for the Parisian, the worldly one, the *bon viveur*, the man broken into his traffic with women, to surrender all so quickly and that without actual contact, gesture or amorous conversation ; still more without a single word on the subject being spoken ! It's incredible ! ”

So be it !

Incredible maybe to the slow-working mentality of a psychological analyst with literary pretensions, but perhaps that is because literary psychologists prefer to analyse cases of ordinary love, fashionable love or small love affairs. Before the great crisis in my life, I, too, knew and experienced those affairs that were controlled by rules of convention no less stringent than the most officious social dictates—rather protracted conversations in a drawing-room, arrangements for more frequent meetings in public, a few commonplace episodes, and finally when this illegal engagement seemed to its two participators to have lasted long enough, a gentle separating and ending. Even when I was dancing to it, that sentimental minuet never

appeared to merit the appellation of love. Love, as foreseen by our conversations at Versailles, and suddenly realized for me by my destiny, was far different, a violent and abrupt upheaval of one's way of living. A being who was not previously in one's life, makes her entry into it and her presence at once becomes more definite and more vital than everything else. If there has been any psychological preparation for such an upheaval, it has been got over in advance and taken place, so to speak, internally and perhaps unconsciously in the patient. A few inches before reaching the edge of the cataract, the stream is peaceful and calm, but once it touches that edge, it becomes a torrent; yet it is its previous placid course that has brought it to the fall and caused it to become a torrent. Des Grieux met Manon on the Place d'Amiens and, before even speaking to her, proclaimed her "mistress of his heart." As in all the other great emotions of the soul—pain, anger, heroism—suddenness is the great characteristic of love.

Sophie in her absence possessed my life, and I was certain that I likewise occupied all of hers. The lies and wiles that women practice in what is called love were familiar to me, and I am not vaunting my fatuity if I confess that the realization of any advantage I ever gained in love affairs was always a surprise to me. Yet I was sure that Sophie loved me and that I was

the loadstone of her existence just as she was of mine. Our lips had confessed nothing, and our hands, those bold confidants that sometimes betray lover's secrets against their owner's wishes, had jealously guarded ours. No matter, I knew and she knew, too, just as the sensitive organs of the body have no need to consult the barometer to tell if the atmospheric pressure is getting heavier or lighter.

During those long weeks of my isolation, I felt nervous, irritable and downcast, and underwent a martyrdom packed with dreams and fancies of my imagination, like a modern Saint Hieronymus in his wasps' nest, but yet I repeat I was far from feeling desperate. I should certainly have been, had anyone told me "Sophie is in love with someone else," but the contrary was so firmly implanted in my mind that she alone could have dislodged it. In spite of all—her flight with Robert, the quasi-married life she had assumed with him, and the devotion she poured out for him before my eyes—I was certain that it was me she loved although Robert actually possessed her. Fate with ironical caprice, whilst permitting the two lads to attain the object of their dreams, had only handed over a part of his conquest to each. He had possession and I desire, that precious "desire of the other" without which possession is nothing but a mirage. I shall make no effort at self-defence if I am told that this conviction

of mine had no solid foundation, and that I could have raised strong objections to it. I can but repeat that love, as I conceive it and as I felt it, is a violent upheaval of one's soul, and in this case maybe my judgment had been shaken out of its true balance by the shock.

Sophie did not write, but a letter from Robert brought me news of the couple at least once a week, and each letter brought me an urgent appeal to rejoin them, first at Algiers, then at Blidah, and then on a circular tour that was to bring them back to Algiers about the end of the winter. As excuse I truthfully pleaded my work, that was in effect becoming daily heavier and more exacting, and to have broken it off at that time would have been tantamount to letting down the inaugurator of my new career. About the end of March I was aided by a fresh excuse, for the first volume of Robert's work was at press and it had been arranged that I should take charge of the corrections of proofs and all matters in connection with publisher and newspapers.

On my part I insisted in every letter I wrote them, that Robert should keep me fully informed as to the state of his health, but I only received brief and evasive replies whose cheerfulness often seemed forced. Who has not, when reading pages penned by someone dear, received that mysterious revelation of unwritten thoughts that seem to be printed between the

lines with more vigour and clearness than the written characters? In the letters Robert wrote me, I only felt he was really at his ease and being perfectly sincere with me in those sentences where he expressed his desire to see me, or when speaking of his coming publication, he touched on or discussed general ideas. Then he became once again my good old friend, my companion at school and war, animator and controller of my mind, in short my *alter ego*. Over the more intimate passages relating to his physical health and his happiness with Sophie, I laid the magic crystal of my perception, and found that a different text was visible. Robert was not cured, his conjugal love was not exempt from anxiety and sorrow; this I was as sure of as I was of loving Sophie and of her loving me. Sophie's silence was but added proof of this, for why should she never write me herself? Essentially for the same reasons that I never wrote to her—that any letter that was not confidential could only serve as a mask for the truth.

Between the agitation caused by my thoughts and the work I was loading on to myself, the days gradually rolled on from the future to the present, and the present to the past. Robert and Sophie's return was fixed for the spring, provided that the temperature was favourable, as the spring of 1922 promised to be. My friend's book had appeared

about the end of February, and its success was immediate despite the esoterism of the subject and the sustained attention required to grasp thoroughly a matter that was wonderfully well written up. I have practically betrayed the name of the book by saying, as I have done already, that no first book had had such brilliant success since Henri Poincaré, and Robert, knowing its real value, was not insensible to this, although he had never foreseen for it any acclamation from the general public or the strange admiration it occasionally displays for works that are beyond its grasp. His letters expressed his gratification and I felt he would accordingly hasten his return to Paris, and in this I was not wrong, for I presently heard from him that he would be arriving some time after the beginning of March and begging me to put the flat he still kept in the Rue Hautefeuille in some sort of order. This task I set about with an inordinate amount of pleasure, and when the couple eventually reached Paris on April 6th, Sophie no less than Robert could clearly note my desire that their daily life should be pleasant and easy for them from the way I had fixed up their abode and made all necessary arrangements to save them trouble.

Possibly through premeditation on the part of Sophie or of both, I was not warned of their arrival in time to meet them at the station, and the first news I had of them was when they rang

me up on the 'phone, saying that they had reached home and were expecting me to lunch there.

No romantic emotion marked my meeting with Sophie, for it is only in novels of the conventional type that two lovers meeting before witnesses after a long separation, tremble, pale and swoon. We, on the contrary, stood on that neutral ground where each of the two seems to face a being unlike the one he left and expected to see again. The fact of the matter is that we are such changeable beings; the absent one has undergone modification at the same time as his or her image was undergoing another sort of alteration in our memory, and the two images take some little time to fit and coincide when superposed one on the other. Sophie had scarcely changed, but the little alterations in her hair, her dress, her gait, her manner of being and speaking had all taken place in an opposite sense to what I had dreamed. In the loneliness of my exile from her, my ardent imagination had accentuated and exaggerated the exotic characteristics of this strange woman—her accent, Northern pose, a certain scholarliness in her pronunciation, and gestures less subtle and expressive than those of our Western women. Six months of Algeria, in places haunted by Mediterranean elegance, had exercised their influence over her, and thus it was that I found her a tastefully clad Westerner, of



easy grace, no longer speaking the dead language of the grammars but modern French, and much too conversant with the attenuations of our language to say unhesitatingly as once before, "Robert and I have given each other our virginity," or, "No one has the right to take life." So complicated are our hearts that I resented her perfection at first, but the neutral zone was soon crossed, and I had to admit to myself, "She is more beautiful than ever and has lost nothing of that which is essential in her—her stateliness and wonderful impassivity."

And I? How did I appear to her, I wondered. That was what I asked myself in my mirror—as any woman might—on the evening of our first meeting, that was pathetic by the very absence of any visible trace of emotion. Robert, when I congratulated him on his looks (he had indeed got a little fatter and his sun-bronzed face seemed less sallow), Robert had told me, "You don't look any too fit. You're working too hard . . ." My mirror told me as much—drawn features that had fined down as though worn out, greying hair on my head—but apart from all vanity, be it understood, I perceived that that face revealing bridled passion and those features consumed by internal fires, was more striking, more fascinating, and—dare I use the word?—more handsome than the round, pink face I used to have when I was a smug idler and a placid egotist. I could have

sworn that Sophie preferred them as she now saw them.

\* \* \* \*

The couple's life in Paris soon acquired some sort of order, for Robert, after the inevitable influx of disciples and the curious, set to work again and was only "At Home" once a week, whilst Sophie was following some courses at the *Collège de France*. I put every available hour of freedom my work left me at their disposal, and began to feel pleasure in life with them once more after my long solitude. I fully realized the danger of such an existence, but where find the strength to deny myself?





## VII

I EXPECTED no confidences from Sophie and Robert made me none at first, but alas! on seeing them again after an interval of seven months, it was not difficult to realize the change that had come over the couple since I had met them at Geneva. With the woman there was nothing more than an absent-minded far-away look, despite her obvious efforts to collect her straying thoughts, but it was evident that the man was suffering. His gaze, whose brightness had not dimmed, ceaselessly followed his companion about and seemed to envelop her just as the limelight in a theatre follows an actor about in his wanderings across the stage. His hands felt for and touched her instinctively and then, without any apparent revolt on her part, broke contact with her as though they had received an influx of some opposing elec-

trical current. When he and I were by ourselves, as frequently occurred when Sophie was at her lectures, conversation between us sometimes faded away into a silence I dared not break, so afraid was I of the confession that I felt was imminent.

That confession came about at my flat one morning during a visit Robert was paying me on the pretext of bringing me the proofs of the first part of his second book to read. This we looked into together for a few minutes and then pushing it sharply on one side, Robert exclaimed :

“Now you’re not supposing for a moment that I’ve left my work to show you these outpourings of mine a few hours before they are finished, are you ? You’re far too perspicacious not to have guessed the object of my visit.”

Whilst he was speaking, I saw him stiffening up to counter his emotion, but his nerves and muscles refused to obey and he was obliged to speak in low tones, halting between sentences so as not to give way to a sob. At seeing the disorder of this being, usually so strong and master of himself, and one of whom I was so fond, I myself became of a sudden more upset even than he was.

“This is how things are at present,” he continued. “You know how I’ve linked my life to Sophie’s. When she gave herself to me, she asked for no engagement nor did she give any.

You know, of course, that I'm not a man of many women. She's the first I've ever known, and I shall never know any other even if—she died, or if—she left me.” (He required a great deal of firmness to get out these last words.)

“But she is free to dispose of herself and I should never do anything to hinder her liberty. Well, at the present moment I'm wondering whether——” (Here he hesitated and had to stop for a few seconds, shut his eyes and hold his hand to his forehead.) “I'm wondering whether our life together is not getting on her nerves.”

“Oh !” I exclaimed, “how can you——?”

“No, old man, don't protest ! I've known perfect happiness, such complete and splendid intimacy of soul and body as our Versailles dreams never conceived of.” (Here I felt myself pale, but fortunately he was studying the pattern of the carpet just then.) “That intimacy lasted, I should imagine, until after my illness at Montpellier—yes—and even in Algeria at first, unless I'm wrong and it was ended before that, unknown to me. As I daresay you understand, one can't actually see one's happiness vanish, but the symptom is an inertia of all one's being——”

His sentence finished off with a confused gesture and, in order not to lose countenance and have to throw myself at his feet, I started repeating to myself, “But I did nothing wrong ;

on the contrary, I mustered the courage to go away, and I've suffered too. No one has had to suffer as I've had to !”

“ At first, you understand,” continued Robert, in a monotonous tone, “ I stayed off my anxiety and treated my trouble as neurasthenia or the strain of overwork, for it was just about the time the book was due to appear. It's futile to try to be level-headed, to realize that fame is soon won and as easily lost these days, but it's evident that I was blinded by my success and filled with optimism. Sophie, too, shared in my success to such an extent ! She seemed so pleased and so proud. Yes, I'm sure she was proud, but when the haze of glory had dispersed, I found myself face to face with reality. My dear Antoine, why should I go on deluding myself any longer ? So far as I'm concerned, Sophie is no longer the youthful being who came and offered herself to me, saying, “ I know that you love me and I want to be yours.” She's my companion—just my companion. She looks after my house and my comfort. She's amiable, devoted and sweet, but that's 'all, you understand, that's all.”

He could get no further with his confession, but all of a sudden after a mute pause, collapsed on the corner of my desk by which he was sitting and started sobbing like a thrashed boy. I tried to raise him and move those massive shoulders and big head, but he sobbed out,

"No—no—leave me. I can't go on any longer like this." In despair I sat down beside him, holding the finger-tips of one of his hands, till finally he sat up, wiped his forehead and said :

"You see how things are with me. I can't boast of my courage, but perhaps I've some excuse, for I'm not fit by any means."

"Do you mean to say that you're not really cured of your throat affection?"

"I don't think I am, but why worry over my health? Let's leave that on one side for a bit, shall we?"

He reseated himself and tried to look me straight in the eye as he continued :

"You know what Sophie's like—a woman one can't question outright on her feelings. To anyone who loves her it would be like trepanning her and trying to read her brain. One would realize that it would cause her too much pain, hasten a catastrophe and—well, one just couldn't do that. That's why I've never questioned her, never complained, and I should probably never have said anything about this to you if she herself——"

I could not refrain from interrupting, "It's she then——"

"Yes. She . . . oh ! Without letting me know any of her thoughts, of course, or even why she desired a private interview with you. All she told me was that she wished it—not to ask my permission, you understand, because

there's nothing like that in our relations. She merely told me she wished to have a private chat with you, and begged me to find out what time would be convenient to you."

"And you have a presentiment that she means to talk to me about——?"

"The change in our relations? Probably, unless it's about something entirely different."

"Your health, then?"

"Yes. You see, it's quite possible that I'm a doomed man, and that she wants to consult you before breaking the news to me."

He attempted to laugh, with dreadful result, since his effort had the effect of accentuating his words and making them sound so terribly sincere.

"She has not told you," he went on, "she never says anything and I didn't want to alarm you, that I had a terrible time in Algiers with my throat. She had radium applied to it, and that brought me relief for a while, but I went through such torture afterwards that I wouldn't try the treatment again. I've gone back to local anæsthetics and sometimes seem to be deriving some benefit from them now. Believe me or not, as you will, but if I were sure that it is that, and that alone, that she wants to tell you—that it's all over with me—how pleased I should be! Well, I'm off, for I expect you've had enough of me for to-day and I simply can't stand any more myself just at present. Will you



see Sophie here to-morrow morning about eleven ? If so, she could call in on her way back from her lecture at the *Collège de France*, for her life goes on in the same regular way, just as mine does. Will that time suit you ? Thanks, old man."

He squeezed my hand very hard indeed and hurried out of my study, as though he were suffocating and as though under the influence of that need to escape that medical men term *raptus*, which sometimes urges the patient to jump out of a window or the carriage-door of a train.

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I have read too many novels not to feel that my narrative is lacking in the 'picturesque,' for in it I am only describing consciences and neglecting still-life, interiors, costumes and atmosphere. The reason is that I am writing a plain and simple confession which, if read, will have the effect of instructing rather than amusing the reader ; and besides, at times like those I am endeavouring to describe, life—so far as the unfortunate actors are concerned—is compressed into three or four deep and indelible impressions that are bound to stand out in relief every time our memory recalls those hours. The rest has either faded away or not been seen or felt to any great extent in the first instance.

It appears, for example—and my valet has assured me that it was so—that during the fifty minutes interview I had with Sophie on the day following Robert's visit, the telephone bell rang five times, and though the instrument is close to my study and I have particularly keen hearing, I cannot recollect it ringing. On the other hand, my mind was sufficiently lucid and disengaged to notice that the little clock on my desk had been carelessly cleaned and that it still retained a fine coating of dust on its gilded top. I can clearly see Sophie sitting there in the big leather armchair facing me and very close to me, wearing her sables and a dark brown tailor-made costume, but I should find it difficult, if not impossible, to say at what specific moment she put her furs over the back of her chair. Yet as to the interview itself in its minutest details, the intonation of her voice, movements of her hands, fleeting variations of her expression, the ebb and flow of my own feelings and thoughts, and the recollection of the few words I spoke—all that I can describe with the mechanical faithfulness of an automatic recorder.

When I mentioned my thoughts, I should say that these were suddenly illuminated as though by an electric spark from the moment that Sophie commenced speaking. For the very first time I had an insight of the essential law that controlled her nature and saw that Robert

was right in his estimate of her, for this woman could not undergo any questioning or investigation regarding her thoughts or feelings, although she was quite capable of revealing herself spontaneously, and the need for self-expression might become imperative and irresistible for her, when a sort of pressure from within would break all bounds. Such was her present case. Whilst she was speaking, her face retained its calm and she gesticulated no more than usual and modulated her voice, but the whole of her being betrayed relief at being able to ease her mind. So she must have appeared to Robert on the day she went to him to tell him "I know you love me and I want to be all yours . . ." The same disdain for sentimental conventions, the same frankness animated the confession she made to me. In that armchair where she had seated herself to talk to me, other women, more versed in our light usages of love, had settled themselves with complacent intent in days gone by, yet they would not have spoken the confession that Sophie uttered, and which doubtless they would have pronounced "shocking" if they had been able to hear it, or else burst into peals of laughter.

Poor parrots ! Let them laugh at me if they will, but Sophie seemed to me the very picture of shame and distress when she told me, "I am humiliated and full of consternation at what I discover in myself, but now that I've dis-

covered it, I can't go on as though I were still ignorant of it. I offered my body happily to Robert, convinced that I should feel perfect contentment in bringing him such happiness. I was full of admiration for his wonderful genius and his mind so impregnated with wisdom and forbearance, and also I was very smitten with his looks. He revealed my own intelligence to me and made me the child of his spirit. I felt that he loved me and would die rather than declare his love, and so you must understand, Antoine, that the very idea of bringing happiness to such a great, good and dear person simply intoxicated my girlish mind and I was really under the impression that such intoxication was love."

She halted for a brief space after those words that echoed through me in the silence, and I am ashamed to have to admit that I experienced a violent and increasing joy in me—a very cyclone of joy that swept all before it.

"I must tell you," she continued, "that I was brought up to realize the material side of love, for I spent my childhood in the country in a land where the peasants carry on their love-affairs in a fashion very closely resembling the animals. My medical studies and the free life of some of the girl students who were friends of mine, all served to open my eyes, but still—I was *virgo intacta*. I felt no desire for men's caresses, and that must have been plain to see,

for I was not much courted, and it seems that there is something in my eye that frightens men off, or paralyses them. When I was nineteen years old, I was told that one of my fellow students seriously considered committing suicide on my account, but that was hardly my fault, was it, since he had never even spoken to me? Then came the Revolution and I found myself compelled to defend my honour as well as my life, and the few trinkets I was carrying with me. If you only knew the sights I witnessed at that time and what the male beast can be like when he has broken all laws and is no longer afraid of punishment! I do not know to this day how I managed to come safely out of that orgy of bestiality, but there again I noticed the strange effect of my eyes on a man when I looked him full in the face. Anyway, I managed to escape—but as you can well imagine, when I at least reached the country where I was later to meet Robert, it was no longer mere indifference that sexual love inspired in me but violent aversion and a sort of terror. Give me a glass of water, Antoine, please—No, just pure water. Thank you.”

After sipping the water, she was silent a while and so absolutely still that I began to be alarmed, but not daring to touch her, I ventured to enquire as I stood by her side:

“Are you feeling unwell?”

“No,” she replied, “it’s nothing, but what

remains is so difficult for me to tell you. Come and sit down here beside me and let me speak without interruption, as you have done until now. You shall answer me afterwards, for I shall have some very definite questions to put to you. There, that's right. Listen to me. I'm better now and feeling happy to be here alone beside you."

Never had the most burning words of passion, stammered out in the fervour of love's embrace, thrilled the whole of me, body and soul, as did those few humble words, "I feel happy to be alone beside you."

"When I first loved Robert," she continued, "I mean, when I felt intoxicated with the desire to bring happiness to a genius whom I admired, whose presence was dear to me and who loved me in return, you may guess that the question of the giving of my body and its sacrifice to male desire greatly perplexed me—yes, preoccupied me to the verge of anguish——"

She stopped but, overcoming her hesitation, continued, "——and I think you ought to know something that Robert has not told you, for he could not have done so. When I offered myself to be his companion, I asked him to promise to respect my person as long as I should require him to—for always, if I so willed it."

"But—then?" I enquired, my heart hammering with anxiety.

"No," she replied, shaking her head. "I am his wife. I wanted to be, for I saw that he was too miserable, and my desire was to make him happy. Antoine, you mustn't cry!"

Just as Robert had done on the previous day, I covered my face with my hands to hide my tears and stifle my sobs. Never had I seen Robert sob before, and as to myself, I had always been able to avoid tears at other times in my worst anguish. What a power had this woman to be thus able to beat down our wills!

She made no attempt to comfort me, as I had done for Robert, but waited without moving or speaking, and when I had sufficiently regained mastery of my nerves to lift up my head and wipe my face, she appeared exactly as she had done on saying the words, "Antoine, you mustn't cry." Somehow I felt full of resentment, humiliated at my weakness and vaguely annoyed with her for being the cause and witness of both, but she read my thoughts and:

"I think you're unjust," she said. "When these things occurred, *I did not know you!*"

By what chance or superhuman clairvoyance had she dropped on the very words with which to reach my heart? Why do I not possess the science of analysis or the virtuosity of a Stendhal? Possibly the reader of these lines will realize just as I did that those five words, "I did not know you," expressed the frankest

declaration of love between two beings who until that moment had never exchanged a word of love with each other.

On seeing that she had won me over, she went on again, neglecting or rather passing over in her stride, such comments as might have been logical but were entirely unspeakable.

"If you had met me when I was free, I think you would have asked me to be yours. Don't reply. I see you are worried on Robert's account and that's futile. That I'm sure of. Well, I've come to assure you that I'm free."

"I know," I replied, "Robert told me so yesterday."

For the first time since the commencement of our strange interview a thrill of desire ran through me, caused in all probability by the sudden realization that we were both of us free and in love with each other, and that the crown of our happiness was within our reach, but she was aware of that fleeting temptation and murmured, "Be careful." I pulled myself together.

"Let me enlighten you further," said she. "I am free, in accordance with the agreement I made with Robert. To be sure, he appreciates me and my presence near him, but though he has been unhappy since I have become merely a faithful sister to him, he would be less so if things were readjusted in their proper order, and that's what I should like too."



"What!" I exclaimed. "Could you tell Robert——?"

"I shall say nothing but what you agree to, since the matter concerns both of us, and after thinking things well over, I find that I cannot dispose of something that is not mine alone. Besides, I know you. You're too civilized a person and too worldly to believe, as I do, that the naked truth is a hot iron that wounds and cauterizes at the same time."

"Sophie," I murmured, "I am yours, body and soul, but I don't want to kill my friend."

Gazing at me with those motionless eyes of hers till I felt she was looking right through me and reading all my mind, she returned, "Your friend is lost!"

I started, but I must admit that at that moment anxiety for my friend was uppermost in my thoughts.

"It's not possible," I blurted out. "Why, I only saw him yesterday."

"Robert is doomed, and in the present state of medical science, there isn't the slightest chance of saving him."

"What is it? Cancer?"

"You've guessed aright. Yes, it's cancer of the left tonsil, formed before our union and developed since, but its activity has increased since our return to Paris. And now I'm going to tell you a dreadful memory I carry with me. Do you know when it was I first suspected

cancer? It was on the very night I gave my virginity to Robert. Yes, when my arms were twined about his neck, my fingers encountered that suspicious hardening. Such was my bridal."

For an instant she covered her eyes with her left hand and I remarked :

" But—it can be cured—sometimes? "

" Not when it's as bad as this or in the form this case of cancer has assumed from the beginning. The end always comes sooner or later. The devouring beast may be still for weeks or even months, but the result is inevitable."

" And he will suffer? "

" Yes, that's the most dreadful part of it. He'll suffer uselessly, suffer to win the right to die. If ever such a thing happens to me, I swear I'll not wait for the beast to bite."

As she hung on her last words, I told her, " Let us at least do all we can to make life bearable for him, and above all else, let us try to avoid hurting him."

" Ah! " she sighed. " What a true Westerner you are. If you'd seen the things I've seen and knew what all your conventions and laws are worth when the whole social fabric is crumbling about your head! The living must not be sacrificed to the dead nor health sacrificed to sickness; that is the true law, and the holy one. You think otherwise, for it's your right to do so, but don't imagine you are helping all that

is left of your friend, for the contrary is the case. I know him better than you, and I daresay that I love him more than you do. He would have understood the abdication that seems inhuman or superhuman to you, because his mind is great and just and it would have cast a wonderful glamour over his last days, in which he would have found consolation for his inevitable end. But so be it! It's not possible."

She thereupon got up and put on her cloak.

"Then, Sophie," I murmured, "you don't love me any more?"

"Oh yes, I do love you," she answered me. "I, in my turn, am bowing to that absurd and incomprehensible law. I am attracted to you for no reason or for contemptible ones, such as your face, your body, the incense of you, your way of speaking and expressing yourself. It all used to make me laugh at one time when I saw other women thus affected, but now it's my turn to go through it."

"My darling," I exclaimed, overwhelmed by her strange admission, and instinctively moving in her direction to take her hands, but she recoiled from me.

"Don't touch me," she muttered in low tones. "If you touch me, I shall lose control of myself and not know what I'm doing, and if you have me that way, you'll be an enemy of mine for ever."

She made a move in the direction of the door

and I followed at a distance, for my brain was swimming with a confusion of ideas. "It is she who is right," I reflected dizzily, "and I've been a mere dupe." Then suddenly a vague thought that had been worrying me since the moment she had spoken of her bridal night, took a definite shape in my mind, and I asked her, as though her example had bridged all conventions of language for both of us :

"Are you sure that, if I were in Robert's place, your dislike for sexual love would not apply to me likewise?"

The crudeness of the question in no way seemed to surprise her, for she answered :

"No, Antoine."

She paused in her speech and retreated into the shadow beside the doorway, as though to hide herself from my sight as she continued :

"I am sure of loving you—just as all women do who are very much in love. Do you remember—at Montpellier—in the room where we watched over Robert's convalescence? One night, when you were sleeping in the red armchair. I came close up to you—took your hand and kept it in mine—and a great and wonderful happiness was then revealed to me Antoine, Antoine, don't touch me!"

Ridiculous as it may seem, I obeyed her, and as she opened the door and passed in front of me, I said :

"I belong all to you. Let's both do all we

can to save the man we're both fond of. No other woman but you will ever exist for me—and if Fate wills it that you are free—

“Uncertain heart!” she interrupted me, with a strange smile, and added, “But I believe you all the same.”

I was as exhausted by that strange scene as though from a night of possession, but do not imagine that I thought myself in any way heroic, for I was not even very sure that I had acted up to my real duty, and I felt that my decisions, gestures, words, and my very conscience, had only been the natural consequence of my character, education and upbringing and also perhaps of my prejudices.





## VIII

WHEN I tell you that life resumed its usual course after the scenes I have described, I mean that it went on for Sophie, Robert and myself as though Robert and Sophie had neither of them confided in me. I knew that Robert would not venture to question either of us on what had occurred at my interview with his mistress, and that Sophie would naturally not discuss the matter with Robert, but as for me, the Westerner, the worldly French weakling, in my case a pity that Sophie would have immediately labelled as contemptible, constrained me to speak to Robert spontaneously and—as Sophie would have foreseen—I had to burden my conscience with one of those lies I have mentioned before, that our catechism terms ‘white lies.’

"Sophie has assured me," I told him, "that you are on the highroad to complete recovery, but for the time being you must go slow. That's why she's been keeping away from you."

Thus I thought to reassure him and wondered to myself whether he really believed me, knew nothing or suspected nothing. He appeared at least to believe me, and there is no doubt that on the day following Sophie's visit to me, I found him distinctly calmer, and from his looks and speech there emanated as it were a superior kind of resignation, like superhuman serenity. At the same time, the "devouring beast" seemed to be quiet—a factitious calm, Sophie assured me, for she was henceforth to keep me in touch with the progress of the malady. The disease, she explained, was feeding on inert tissues, but once they were used up, it would attack live ones, causing great agony and there would then ensue a dreadful time for all three of us. My fear of that catastrophe was such that I lived only in the present, despite certain symptoms of failing on the part of the patient who was getting thinner and weaker and at times did not seem quite normal mentally.

Anxiety over the threatened crisis, the shadow hovering over us, and intimate remorse for the secret I possessed, all served to make my friend dearer to me and I started to reproach

myself for every moment that was not consecrated to him. Once a day at least I climbed the four flights in the Rue Hautefeuille, four flights of an unpretending staircase, whose uncarpeted steps of worn and blackened oak were nevertheless always clean-swept. The inhabitants of the house were respectable folk whose names, as is usual in that kind of building, were inscribed on their doors for the greater convenience of visitors. On the first floor a copper-plate on the right of the entrance, bore the words, "*Mademoiselle Esther Billy, Modiste.*" The second floor was a furnished flat, where sometimes no indication as to its occupant was to be seen; at other times there would be a visiting card fixed to the upper panels with a drawing-pin. In the course of a few weeks I noticed the names of a succession of people who had occupied that flat for a little space and then gone on their ways. There had been a jeweller; a dramatic artiste from the *Théâtre de la Monnaie*, Brussels; but latterly it had been Doctor Jules Viécourt, Surgeon-Lieutenant in the Navy. The landlord occupied the third floor, and at last I would reach the top and knock at the door that would be answered by one of the two servants. I used to ask mechanically as I handed over my coat and hat, "Is your master well?" and then pass in without waiting to hear the reply, knowing that my eyes would soon tell me all I wanted to know of the



invalid's condition. I still go through the nightmare of that climb some nights and it is such torture to me that occasionally I seek insomnia as a boon to escape from it.

\* \* \* \*

However, Sophie's robust mental and physical constitution were sufficient for all the tasks that events imposed on her, for Robert had, and desired, no other doctor than her, or any other nurse at moments of crisis. In that atmosphere of pain, fatigue and alarm, she had restarted and was carrying on her studies, for she intended to take her medical degree in France in order to be able to practise locally. As for the disturbance in her heart and senses, she hid that so well that, though I believed in her sincerity when she had confessed herself to me, I began to doubt or at least to wonder, "Has she got over it?"

Towards the middle of January, she had to give up two afternoons in succession to see about her entry to the medical school, and it was agreed between her and myself that I should pass the whole of those two afternoons at the Rue Hautefeuille. Robert was not in much pain, thanks probably to the effect of the sedatives he had been having, but he seemed to be slipping into a kind of prostration that began to alarm me. No untoward incident

occurred on the first of the two afternoons I spent alone in his company, except between the fragments of conversation we exchanged, where he sometimes regained all his former eloquence, when he would slip into a kind of stupor or sleep with his eyes open, that isolated him from me as completely as any lethargy. Then he would no longer hear me and one might think he could not see, until he would gradually come back to lucidity and life, and our talks would begin again.

Sophie was waiting for me on the following day when I got there.

"I'll try not to be longer than I can help," she told me. Robert had a bad attack this morning about eleven—the beginning of what I foresaw. I've calmed him with the usual thing, but if by chance a fresh attack of pain threatens, give him another hypodermic injection in the left shoulder. You will see the marks of previous ones. You won't find any difficulty about it."

She handed the box of tubes to me, explained their use, and went out, whilst I went in to see Robert, whom I found lying on a deck-chair in his study, with his back propped up with cushions. He was quite calm and lucid.

"My dear old Antoine," he said, shaking my hand, "things are not going well with me by any means. The left gland in my throat tortures me terribly at times, just as if a crab were nipping

me hard with his claws. And besides, I seem to be suffocating."

I was smitten with wonder how a man of his perspicacity and scientific learning had not formed a suspicion of the real nature of his complaint, and yet there was nothing to show that he was feigning ignorance.

"You're not feeling suffocated now, are you?" I asked him.

"Oh, no. That wonderful injection with heroin, Sophie's masterpiece, has calmed me. Unfortunately, the doses have to be increased each time, and that throws me into such a weird kind of stupor."

"I don't see that it has much lowering effect on you, though."

"Quite so, but that's a bad sign."

"What exactly do you mean by that?"

"Why, that I've regained all my senses and my lucidity bit by bit, and that you've just come at the right moment. Just now, I happen to be on the half-way line, where my instinct is not dulled nor is the crab biting. Stay with me and you'll see. In half-an-hour that interior gnawing will begin again—first a slight pricking, accompanied with a certain amount of heat; then the pricking will get worse until finally it becomes intolerable."

"I've got instructions from Sophie," I assured him. "I won't let you suffer needlessly."

"Dear Sophie!" he murmured. "My dear

wife!" then, gathering himself together, he went on, "This painful journey that I'm taking to some unknown destination is so softened by her that I cannot feel any more resentment against Fate. Never before has any invalid been nursed with such care. She's mother, sister and daughter to me, and has resumed every form of feminine tenderness. Certainly she's no longer my wife in the physical sense of the word, but then no one could be a wife to a wretched pain-wracked sufferer like me. Yet there are compensations, for my weary body experiences no desire now, and so we have fallen back to our common doctrine—do you remember the subject of our conversations?—on the feeble merit of chaste persons."

Thus we chatted on quite calmly for nearly an hour without his appearing to suffer. He even seemed to be regaining confidence in the future, was interesting himself over the matter of his second volume, and making schemes. All of a sudden, however, his face contracted, and he fell back on his cushions with a groan. I felt a certain repugnance at first against using a remedy whose danger I was vaguely aware of, so I seized his hands, spoke to him, and tried to encourage him; but I was soon forced to admit that one cannot see a human being suffering as he was when one disposes of the means to relieve his pain. I administered the prescribed injection, and its effect was almost immediate,

for in ten minutes the patient was plunged into a deep sleep. After feeling his pulse that seemed regular, if slow and weak, I settled myself in an armchair close to him with my eyes fixed on him. The calm that had come over his features reassured me, and "It's five past three, Sophie won't be long now," I thought to myself. The smell of the narcotic seemed to cling to my fingers and nostrils and be infused in the atmosphere surrounding me. A faint light revealed the furniture in the room and showed me the motionless form of the invalid on the sofa, whilst an unpleasant kind of weariness seemed to be pressing on my forehead and eyes till I felt myself slipping into a stupor that can scarcely be called sleep.

I reopened my eyes as the clock on the mantelpiece was striking four, and maybe it was the sharp definite chime that recalled me to life. It was darker in the study, and I felt a vague nervousness as I groped for and found the switch controlling the electric light. Robert was still lying motionless on the sofa, and once more I took his limp hand in mine. His pulse was beating with the same slowness and regularity but more weakly, so I started shaking his arm and calling him by name, but there was no response or movement from him.

I must admit that I was then seized with fear and dashed through the flat, calling for the

maid, who emerged from her pantry enquiring, "Were you calling for me, Monsieur?"

"Yes, Marie. Your master settled down to sleep after I'd given him an injection, but I think he's been asleep rather a long time, about an hour. Has the injection always such a lasting effect?"

"An hour? That seems rather long to me. I'll come with you and have a look at him."

We both tried to bring Robert round, but our united efforts were unavailing and I noticed that the girl was getting anxious in her turn. "And Madame's so long in getting back!" she kept repeating.

"Do you know of a doctor hereabouts, Marie?" I asked her.

"Yes, there's one in the Rue des Ecoles," she replied after reflection. "No. 28. His man comes from my home country near Clermont, Would you like me to go and get him?"

I was just about to agree to this proposal when a memory that was purely visual flashed through my mind.

"Wait," I exclaimed. "There's one in the house here!"

"In this house?"

"Yes, on the second floor. I'm sure of it. His card is pinned on the door."

"Oh yes, that's so. You mean the Naval man?"

"Yes. Stay here with your master and don't

leave him. I'll run and fetch the doctor myself."

A couple of minutes later I was knocking at the door where was still fixed that visiting card with the inscription, "Doctor Jules Viécourt, Surgeon-Lieutenant in the Navy." The door was opened to me by a man of about thirty, in his shirtsleeves, but with neat collar and tie—a small, slim clean-shaven man with the hair and colouring of a Southerner. The hall of his flat was lit up, but the landing being in darkness, he could not make out who I was and asked :

"Is that you at last, Daubry?"

I replied, giving my name and my standing at the Quai d'Orsay.

"Come in, Monsieur."

In the room where he took me, that was very evidently his sitting-room, I noticed a couple of naval officer's boxes, a roll of bedding, and the carpet was littered with scraps of paper.

"Please excuse this disorder," he said, noting my glance. "I've got to catch the 6.30 Marseilles express and was waiting for the man to come and collect my kit. What can I do for you?"

I explained my dilemma and whilst I was doing so, he picked up his uniform jacket and slipped it on, and then :

"Let me come up and see if I can be of any assistance," he remarked.

While he was following me up the stairs to the fourth floor, I had time to explain the salient features of the position—cancer in the throat, absence of the doctor attending the patient, the sedative injection administered by myself, and the abnormal sleep resulting in the invalid. As we reached the hall, he asked me :

“Has any surgical operation been attempted?”

“No. There’s never been any question of such a thing.”

“And radium?”

“Yes, I believe that that was tried, but only seemed to aggravate the patient’s suffering.”

When we entered Robert’s study, he was still sunk in the same torpor, so Doctor Viécourt knelt down, felt his pulse and tested his heart with his stethoscope.

“There’s no need for immediate anxiety,” he pronounced as he arose. “The patient will soon come round again, for his pulse is getting more rapid. Has his temperature been taken lately?”

“I suppose so, but I really haven’t the faintest idea what it was.”

“It must be pretty low.”

With the finger-tips of his left hand he was gently stroking the left side of the patient’s neck that was exposed to view.

“Do you see the sarcoma?” he asked me.



I had not done so before, but now that he came to mention it, I could distinctly see an oblong protuberance that appeared to be grafted on to the muscle.

"It's certainly rather late to think of operation now," he added.

"Do you think that an operation might have saved him?"

"Well, you see, I'm by no means a specialist in that matter myself, but it seems to me that there would have been no harm in trying. In the most unfavourable of circumstances, his life might have been prolonged for a year, possibly more. Who is looking after the case?"

I felt myself blushing, though I do not really know why I should have done so.

"His wife," I replied. "She's a doctor, you see."

"Isn't she tall and rather stately?" he enquired, "a very handsome person I've passed three or four times on the stairs?"

"Very probably."

He showed no further curiosity concerning Sophie, but changed the subject and asked me:

"Have you any more tubes like the one you used for the patient's injection, and do you mind letting me have a look at them?"

Taking one, he broke its point off and let a few drops fall into the palm of his hand, where he wetted his finger and tasted it. I could not help remarking that his keen and

expressive features registered a certain amount of anxiety.

"Yes," he declared, "heroin with some other alkaloid—atropin perhaps. It's hard to say on account of the excipient. However, that's no concern of mine, since the patient is being treated by a fellow practitioner. Look, he's beginning to recover."

A slight motion of Robert's fingers was noticeable, and I was so relieved that all my attention was concentrated on the symptoms of returning life until Doctor Viécourt enquired :

"Is Madame—I mean the doctor—likely to be out for long?"

"Oh, no; I'm really surprised she is not back by now. She ought to be here at any moment."

At that moment, Marie, the maid who had been watching the street from the sitting-room window, came in and announced :

"Madame has arrived and is paying off her taxi."

"Well then, I'll be off," said Viécourt. "It's much better that the patient shouldn't see me, so that there is nothing to explain away to him. Besides, I've just got time to catch my train, and if I miss it, I shall likewise miss my boat to-morrow evening."

"Are you going abroad then?"

"Yes, to Indo-China on the cruiser *Colmar*,

a re-christened Hun boat. You were lucky to catch me, for I'm not coming back until September."

"But, Doctor, your fee——"

"You're joking. I couldn't possibly take a fee from a neighbour like yourself."

He was very evidently in great haste to get away and avoid a professional meeting, so I accompanied him to the top of the stairs, shook his hand and watched him run down. At the same moment I caught sight of Sophie coming up, and they met on the half-way landing. Viécourt touched his cap and Sophie nodded in return.

When I was alone with her in the study—save for Robert, whose torpor still persisted although it was losing its distressing likeness to lethargy—I told her of the fright I had had, and though I felt instinctively that the strange doctor's intrusion into the painful drama of our lives was displeasing to her, she allowed nothing of this to be seen.

"You did well," she remarked. "I should have remembered to tell you that there was nothing to be alarmed about. In Robert's state, one must choose between unbearable torture and that torpor that resembles death."

Robert was now beginning to show signs of returning consciousness, and Sophie, looking deep into my eyes, went on :

"Stay, please, Antoine. We shall have him

to ourselves for about an hour, calm and rested, and perhaps accessible to some kind of hope ! If only you knew how hard I try to make these short spells—the last possibly in his life—really and truly happy ! ”

I stayed—and found out that she was right—for it was indeed a pleasant hour, when I sat and saw Robert shining as he used to do, between the two beings he held dear, but I took my leave as soon as I glimpsed the first signs of his returning restlessness, the involuntary gesture he made in trying to touch his neck. I should not have had the strength to remain and see that terrible syringe produced, nor to watch my friend being once more plunged into the abyss of dreadful sleep.

\* \* \* \*

Robert Moret died just thirty-eight hours after the incident I have related, and without any suffering, from heart-failure during a conversation with the woman he called his wife. I was not there at the moment, and the next time I saw my old friend, he was lying still on his bed, watched over by his widow. The particular press of the learned coteries remarked on the importance of his loss, and the general press devoted a few lines to him, but his death had followed too close on his brilliant *début* for the public that had been momentarily

captivated, to recollect the name of this new-comer to fame. Besides, the public had other things to occupy its mind, for a great international conference had just broken up very stormily.

In a regularly attested will, Robert had left all he died possessed of to Sophie, including his numerous MSS.—material for the work he had commenced—requesting the two of us to classify these relics and give them to the world if we thought fit.





## IX

WHEN I started this confession, I thought that it would cover at least twenty pages, but I now find that I have written three times that amount and am only just reaching the climax.

And yet I must admit that I have stated nothing irrelevant and have only inserted those facts that might be considered in some way necessary or foreseen by the narrative, in order better to define and render more intelligible the singular or violent heart crises that occur, whilst endeavouring to render the string of facts in ordinary language.

Among these latter I should include my marriage to Sophie, and so I shall confine myself to saying that "less than two months after Robert's death—as soon as it was materially possible—I married Sophie Reynal." People acquainted with the lives of the three of us

might have criticized our haste adversely, citing the conventions and the customs relating to the re-marriage of widows, but as against this, there was absolutely no one who knew anything of our lives, we had no mutual friends, nor had I imparted to a single soul the drama in which I was involved. Secondly, Sophie was not a widow in the legal sense of the word since she had never been married ; and finally, disdain for such dictates of convention was one of the rare points in social life over which Sophie and I saw eye to eye, even before we were married.

There are other facts that merit mention far more than the foreseen and natural event of our marriage, because they mark an important change in Sophie's moral standing.

She had given herself to Robert specifying her desire that their union should be a free one. When I expressed my wish to marry her, legally and religiously, I had expected at least some demur on her part, but she had merely replied, "As you wish——" and if I had ventured to hazard a guess at her thoughts, I should have been inclined to believe that she was glad to give her consent. This was by no means the only surprise I was to receive in those days. My experience of the fair sex had certainly taught me that a woman cannot be the same with two different men she may belong to, either simultaneously or successively. Sophie

was not to be compared to the dolls I had known, yet nothing could be more different than her behaviour as Robert's mistress and her behaviour once she had become my wife. As Robert's companion she had retained intact the whole of her personality ; had lived beside him, fervently admiring his spirit without adopting his ideas ; devoted to his interests and his well-being without surrendering any of her bachelor habits or renouncing any of the plans she had formed as a girl. When she became my wife, I felt that she at once became mine—body, heart and soul. There was no question with her of practising medicine, for on the day following our marriage we started off on a six-months' trip round the world. Her intellect lost nothing of its keenness, but she shed that imperious attitude that had not been displeasing to Robert, but which to my mind had always seemed rather out of keeping with the rest of her. I realized, not without a certain amount of confusion at first, that she listened to my words as attentively as she had once listened to my friend's, but with the addition of a something of complacency and avidity. It might have been thought that she was sunning herself in the light of my traditions, my ways and even my prejudices as a Westerner and conservative Frenchman, of all indeed that had formerly seemed to repel her, and that she experienced a secret joy in submitting to and adopting them



as her code of life. I should never have imagined the gentle docility she displayed, seeking my advice in every matter relating to our social life, from our relations with the outside world down to details of dress. Her very physical appearance—as far as such was possible in a woman of twenty-six—was modified, that is, her will to submit and her wish to live for and by another, were to be seen in her gait, her gestures and the expression of her face. Her beautiful features certainly lost none of their immutability and still jealously guarded the secret of her thoughts, for my wife was ever unfathomable and unquestionable. Yet far from being cold in our conjugal life together, she appeared to try to avoid being so, as though by some strange new grace, slightly awkward at first, she were essaying to make up to me for the past.

As to the cause of such a quick and profound change, catholic doctors might have sought to explain it by that crude axiom, *Tota mulier in utero*. Rob that axiom of its crudeness and I think the naked truth is revealed. Sophie herself—on the rare occasions when her heart overflowed and she felt she must relieve it at all costs—realized this and proclaimed it. “You alone will have known me,” she would say, “and without you I should never have come to know myself,” or, “You have breathed life into a whole part of me that was not alive, and

I feel that a fresh vital force, emanating from you, rules all that is alive in me. Before I became yours, most other women seemed to me stupid slaves or unclean beasts, but to-day I am annoyed at my former blindness and realize that despite all my efforts to understand men and the world, a simple ignorance of my own body was dooming me to eternal puerility."

And I? This is not the place neither do I wish to express in so many words what life was worth and felt like to me in those days. The most famous masters of poetry or prose have never satisfied me in their efforts to depict love fulfilled; it would seem as if their art, with which they can portray love at its birth, in its progress, in its wane or at its death, deserts them when they make such an attempt. Music alone perhaps of all the arts, by acting directly on our nerves, puts our sensitiveness in a condition to realize the absoluteness of love, at times when we are not actually experiencing it.

When I endeavour to live over in my memory that short but immeasurable period, I feel that I am wandering and losing my way, just as one might in trying to plumb the mystery of one's own existence by concentrating one's thought on that mighty problem and saying aloud to oneself in the silence, "I am!" Try it yourself, and at the end of a moment it will seem as though it is someone else speaking with

your voice. In similar manner when to-day in my loneliness, with broken heart and shattered senses, I tell myself aloud, "I have loved," it seems to me as though another were uttering those formidable words.

How then shall I continue and express myself? By what miracle does this commonplace man-and-woman business, that sometimes causes laughter or else disgust but is most frequently on a no higher plane perceptibly than the enjoyments of the table or the play, suddenly become, through the fated encounter of two predestined bodies, an immense and infinite thing, confusing in a momentary co-existence not only the muscles, nerves, skin, flesh and blood of both creatures, but also their more subtle and immaterial desires, all their capacity for realizing the beauty of life, and all their faculties for giving and devoting themselves to each other?

In that intensity of ardour, physical love becomes purified as though by fire. Thereafter nothing mean or vile can affect it, for it has become something supremely august, akin to creative divinity. There are no words that can tell or express it, so it is futile to attempt to explain it. Although I have personally experienced such love, yet my shattered being has no longer the strength left to realize it now, scarcely even to remember it, except as one of those fleeting dreams that one clutches at as they flash

through one's mind, leaving a sensation of dull ache behind them.

\* \* \* \*

By fairly lengthy stages we visited the countries of Eastern Europe and those parts of Asia that seemed to beckon to us the most. Many a time when I was a frequenter of the flat in the Rue Hautefeuille, had my dear old Robert expressed his desire before Sophie and myself, to make such a pilgrimage in our company, and now, although there were only the two of us, the absent one was never very far from our thoughts, despite the inherent selfishness of accomplished love. We made no effort to delude ourselves about it, and would have deemed it an unworthy thought "Should we have rather——?" Faithfully we maintained between us the memory of that great mind and generous heart, conscious—or so it seemed to me—of having dearly loved him and respected his rights as long as he was alive, and of having solaced him as far as lay in our power in his struggle with Death.

In the latter days of a September as hot as any July, the Italian mailboat *Re Umberto* brought us back to Marseilles. We had arranged to break our journey there for two or three days before going on to Biarritz where we were to stay until the end of the autumn.

Amidst a host of sea-trips, I cannot recall one where the coast-line looked so majestic as we approached it on that brilliant sunny morning. It was as though sea and sky were vying with each other in intensity of blue, and the Phocœan town, with its white houses and background of brown or vineyard-covered hills reaching back to a horizon of mauve-coloured mountains, were extending a greeting to us. As I stood close alongside my wife watching that pleasant land, that was henceforth to be her home as well as mine, coming nearer, a delightful feeling coursed through me. We could find no words, for our thoughts which intermingled and told us that though the coast we were nearing marked the end of our honeymoon, yet it was also the threshold of our home and should thus be welcome to us.

We had reserved a room in a well-known hotel near the old harbour, and Sophie being rather fagged, lay down after lunch on one of the twin beds and rested all day whilst I ran through one of those voluminous but news-lacking mails that meet one at the journey's end. In the evening we dressed for dinner, but, being ready before her, I preceded her to the restaurant to order our meal, for I have always noticed that an ill-chosen repast is often sufficient to spoil the nicest of days. Most of the tables were already occupied, and while I was standing talking to a *maître d'hôtel*, my eyes rested, as

though in spite of myself, on a solitary diner who was just finishing his meal at a table close to me, and reading a paper that was laid beside his plate. A passing traveller in all probability, he was wearing a simple grey suit with soft collar and tie, and the light was reflected from his dark wavy hair. When he lifted his head, our eyes met in sudden recognition, and as the *maitre d'hôtel* left me with an obsequious bow, I had a feeling that the traveller was hesitating before showing that he knew me. Maybe it was that he regretted the interrupted perusal of his paper, but in any case, urged by manners, he got up and held out his hand to me, exclaiming :

“ Surgeon-Lieutenant Viécourt.”

“ I recognized you,” I admitted, and in my turn felt annoyed at my embarrassment, and could only find words just to add, “ Are you passing through Marseilles ? ”

“ Yes, I only landed this afternoon, and a friend who lives near me is coming presently in his car to fetch me back to my home in the country about thirty miles from here. I think it was written, Sir, that I should meet you at the moment of landing, as I did just before my departure.”

There was a strained silence between us till Viécourt plunged headlong into things and spoke of what was passing through both our minds :

"May I venture to enquire news of your friend?"

"I lost him last March."

"Really? The malady was very rapid, then! Did he die of suffocation from the sarcoma?"

"No. He died suddenly, from heart-failure."

My *vis-à-vis* reflected, and I guessed that he wanted to ask further questions, that the case had interested him and that he had thought it over since his visit to the flat in the Rue Haute-feuille.

"The patient," he continued, "had no other doctor to attend him than that lady, that lovely person you told me was his wi——"

He broke off suddenly and I was struck with the rigidity that came over his eyes and all the features of his handsome tanned face, as with a gesture common to all small people, he raised himself slightly on his toes to look over my shoulder at something that had attracted his attention behind me. I turned round to see Sophie, radiant with beauty and calm, coming towards us. I introduced them:

"Doctor Viécourt. My wife."

With perfect self-control, the doctor shook hands with her, and then broke off the meeting.

"I see I am being summoned, so must ask you to kindly excuse me. It has been charming to meet you again like this."

So saying, he dashed off to join another

traveller, a grey-bearded man who was standing at the doorway making frantic signals to him.

\* \* \* \*

"That was the naval doctor who lived in the same house as you," I told Sophie, as we sat down at our table, "the one I called in on account of Robert's persistent sleep that day. Didn't you recognize him?"

"Oh, was that the man?" she simply remarked. "I didn't quite catch his name when you introduced me to him, but I certainly felt his face was familiar to me somehow, for I must have passed him several times on our staircase in the Rue Hautefeuille. A pleasant sort of man, I should think. At any rate he looks intelligent."

We discussed him for a little while and then our conversation veered on to other matters. I was pleased to realize that Sophie was not upset by the encounter, despite the painful memories it evoked, and for myself, if I had been momentarily disturbed, the feeling soon passed, and we dined with appetite. Afterwards, in order to avoid going up to our room immediately, we strolled out to the Cannebiere and took our coffee there. Later we returned, and were both soundly asleep in our twin beds before eleven o'clock had struck.

In the middle of the night—it must have been



about three o'clock, for there was no noise to be heard either in the hotel or the street—I awoke for no reason that I was conscious of, but hardly had I opened my eyes when my mind was clear and alert.

It was a warm night, Sophie was asleep, quite close to me, and I could hear her breathing as calmly as a child in the profound silence.

With extreme fixity and intensity, my thoughts recurred to that meeting before dinner.





## X

At the time when my traffic with women was but a pleasant pastime with me, I took a willing pride in contemplating their beauty, minds and graces, and it occurred to me to remark to some of my chance lady-friends, provoking nothing more than keen amusement, that I considered exceedingly opportune that alleged controversy of the Council of Macon, "*Utrum mulieres animas possideant*": Whether women possess souls?"

So far as the worldly pleasure that usurps the name of love is concerned, the quality of soul of one's female partner is a matter of indifference. Society gossip accuses many of the most seductive of its members of a tale of adventures that would merit the correctional or assize court for ordinary courtesans—public immodesty, lesbism, malthusian practices and

worse—whilst one modern novelist who knows his world of women extremely well, imparts to his heroine the gestures of a Brinvilliers. For the blasé ones, there is possibly a certain perverse attraction in the contrast between the seductiveness of a charming body and contempt for the impure morals it contains. In England, when a homicidal prostitute has been acquitted by the Court, is there not always a baronet, if not a peer, ready and willing to marry her?

It is not the same thing at all when a woman incarnates for you not only sensual happiness, but an adorable refuge from our human misery, when she is at once our solace, our pride, our security, and that warmth of the bosom lauded by Vigny, who states that man, rocked when a child on a female breast, will always dream of its warmth. What a pathetic thought, but how just! If one begins to doubt the soul of the beloved when one loves, as Robert and I had dreamed of loving from our school-days, and as Robert and I had both loved Sophie, one must experience a heart-rending similar to that of a son who doubts his mother. All the dramatic theories of forgiveness will make no difference, for just as filial love could not remain in its former state after such a discovery, so also love's passion could not come through such an ordeal intact. It would survive, but tinged with a mean complacency that would

rob it of its strength, and break for ever its glorious tyranny.

If I have thus expressed, if indeed it is possible to express, what that word love meant for me at that decisive hour, it will be understood that my wakefulness in the Marseilles hotel that was prolonged until dawn, could only result in violent amorous reaction, a mad act of faith.

My wife was still sleeping when I threw off the leaden sleep that had come to me at last. I had fallen off as the dawn was beginning to filter through the shutters and the first tramcars bringing town workers from their suburban homes, to screech over the curves of their rails. I awoke again to broad daylight that offered me the spectacle of Sophie lying in all her youthful splendour.

I may have neglected to mention that our passion, violent as it was and just because its intensity only inflamed us the more, preserved in its very transports, not a chastity but a pure reality. This will doubtless surprise those young couples who glory in what they call their modern tastes and who, no sooner are they married, inaugurate together a round that soon gets beyond the normal. What matter, since I do not fear appearing ridiculous in these pages that are written for myself alone in all probability? I declare that our love realized what those two sensitive schoolboys, Robert and I, imagined what were the loves of the Gods

when they read Homer. In love, all artifice, complication or consideration, is a sign or a confession of weakness. It is a miserable and weak desire that is divided, at the moment of accomplishment, between living reality and imaginary suggestion, and they are poor lovers who must be drugged before they can run the course !

I gazed at my sleeping wife, and I vow that no morose gratification of libertinism was mingled at first with the tender and virile emotion that attracted me to her, as I sat on the edge of my bed. That Mediterranean September night had been tropically hot, and Sophie had thrown back her blanket, so that the white sheet sculptured her body with the accuracy of a high-relief, and her form was that of a Diana arrested when running and changed into marble—one leg stretched out with the toe thrust forward, whilst the other was thrown back with its heel lifted. One arm accompanied the action of the latter, whilst the other, half bent, seemed to judge the line of the course. Bending towards her, I inhaled, as it were, incense, the living emanation of her body. Her hair, whose negligent knot was loosening, was spread over her pillow and exhaled a gorsy scent that excelled to my idea the keenest aphrodisiacs, and recalled to me the tortures I had undergone those nights at Montpellier when that delightful acidity had suddenly overcome

the stale scent of chemicals in my nostrils. The hair of her armpit, that was half lifted, contrasted by more vivid ruddiness with the sombre copper of her head. Her neck and shoulders were bare ; her left breast, uncovered by a broad crease of the sheet, seemed bare as well, though the flimsy transparence of tissue covered it like a faint shadow. Her face too stood out, that perfect mask where neither feature, contour nor shade of colouring could be more harmonious, so that normally my desire for love was always purified without overreaching itself, but was now blended with wonder.

Why on that occasion, that was the first of its kind, did I instinctively avoid that realization of pure plastic beauty, to catch at all the more intimate features that sleep's disorder revealed in that abandoned femininity—the scent of her hair, the uplifted arm, her young athlete's legs in their attitude of running ? It was that the night's restlessness, calmed as neuralgia might be, by the heavy morning's sleep, had just left me for a brief spell and that I felt the need and the necessity to combat its possible return by the action of an irresistible philtre. Oblivion, torpor, and doubtless a sort of inert trust, were within my reach.

However that may be, the hour of loving in serene and lucid ecstasy like the Gods, had passed, and I, mere man like my frail human brethren, needed that upsetting of the mind,

the eclipse of judgment that opium or alcohol gives, but still more surely that mysterious sap gleaned from the lips and the whole body of the eternal temptress.

An instant yet I remained motionless watching the sleep of the woman I loved, until suddenly the desire for sacrilege banished the night's anxieties and all others as well.

I arose, and abruptly tore the veil from the statue. The cry of anguish and of love that Sophie uttered upon being thus rudely awakened and finding herself stripped under my gaze, a gaze laden with that aggressive passion she had never known ; that cry continued in groans and then in sighs when she realized for the first time that the tyranny of my bodily strength desired her without awaiting her consent, all—all, right to the long quivering kiss she gave me when at length I laid myself satiated and exhausted at her side—told me that she forgave me with ecstasy.

\* \* \* \*

I shall say nothing here respecting what was the very essence of that strange and stormy period of our life, but merely note that it was not short-lived, as I might have feared, and that not only the month at Biarritz but the whole winter we spent in Paris, settling in my big bachelor's establishment, were easily devoured

by our married love. Another point worthy of note was that the violent palliative suggested to me by instinct in a moment of desperation, proved efficacious as far as I was concerned, for I went on living in a state of feverish intoxication that left me no time for any kind of meditation, work, reading, reflection, or anything else. Even the examination of the papers Robert had bequeathed us was indefinitely postponed, and I began to understand the deep insignificance of the amusements Paris offers in abundance, those that not only require no effort of intelligence to understand, but that do not even need constant attention as they spread around the spectator an atmosphere of rather vicious voluptuousness—dancing-halls, music-halls, and the rest. They adapt themselves to the tastes of the innumerable couples, legitimate and otherwise, who come to the French capital to live precisely the life that was ours that winter. They suffice to occupy the intervals of intoxication, by furnishing it in its very pauses, with light refreshment to assure its continuity and prepare its recommencement. Such were the amusements that bit by bit began to appear indispensable to us, for by their banality, they fitted in with the voluntary isolation called for by the life of love we were leading. Such a life indeed precludes worldly sociability. I had not introduced my wife to a single soul, but she did not worry



very much over that, and I took very lightly the break with my relations. If occasionally, on chance meeting in a public place, some obstinate person manifested a desire to invade our intimacy, I would announce my departure for the following day in such peremptory tones that the least perspicacious could not fail to understand.

For months and months, in the very heart of Paris, we thus defended the insolent egotism of our love for each other.

To me the most extraordinary part of it all now seems to be that there was no regret and no unhappiness in that vain and fervent kind of life, though it was so different from both Sophie's and my past and though all that was best in us had no part in it. It was not even disturbed or broken into by any occasional worries. The opium of our love drugged us both to such an extent that I ceased to think of what had been the effective cause of so profound a transformation, whilst Sophie appeared to bask in its pleasantness. A woman in love is a happy prisoner who cherishes her bondage and who rejoices in feeling its chains tightening around her, and Sophie followed my lead in this sensual enchantment just as she might have done in a case of religious exaltation or mystic continence. The woman in love has one outstanding characteristic; an instinctive divination of any worry or anxiety distressing the

man she loves, and however slight or transitory might have been the cloud that hovered over me that evening at Marseilles, I wondered whether it had wholly escaped my wife's keen perception. The vanishing of that cloud coincided with the commencement of our new life, and as Sophie found me with every fresh day more keen and passionate than the previous one, with an ardour that burned like fire, it is scarcely to be wondered at if she preferred such vivid passion where all past anxiety was consumed.

So we were happy, but on looking back on that period of my life, I cannot say that I appreciate or am proud of it, but its memory stirs no emotion in me to-day. Basically this nature of ours is intermingled with so many impurities that I think I rather despise that period without regretting that I lived through it, and maybe, if I must be frank, I must admit that I should not like *not* to have lived it.

\* \* \* \*

We were happy certainly, but while that less pure form of bliss lasted, something altered in our relations other than the standing of our love, for we began to be a couple like the majority—each knowing the other's weaknesses and making light of them so long as love lasted. Before that, rightly or wrongly, we

were wont to regard each other as beings of exceptional moral worth, for each of us had furnished the other during Robert's lifetime, with a fairly rare example of virtue, or as Robert himself would have expressed it, "moral cleanliness." Sensuality, even in married love, mingles features of animalism with the image of the beloved, and this is absolutely true, although one may find excellent reasons to prove that the thing is absurd and unjust. That is why the powerful antidote revealed to me by the instinct of preservation that morning as I sat on the edge of Sophie's bed was nothing more than a sedative or anæsthetic causing me to forget my pain since I felt no more suffering, but the cause of the evil remained and was even gathering strength, as I soon began to discover. Its strength had increased in measure as Sophie, in my eyes, came down from the pedestal of idealism where my great love and adoration had placed her in the first instance. During my insomnia at Marseilles I had realized that my anxiety was causing my thoughts to revolve around a problem, but the theory Sophie suspected was not admitted by me for one instant. I told myself in all sincerity, "The thing is absurd, impossible," and was nearly accusing myself of delirious imagination and sickly hallucination, but after our long journey through human sensuality, my resistance to doubt was strangely

weakened, as an incident in our daily life was sufficient to prove to me.

In the early days of spring, Sophie was compelled to keep to her bed. There was nothing seriously the matter with her, but in such a slight and common affection as was hers, it is often sufficient for a woman if she have complete rest and care. We called no one to the patient's bedside, for she was her own doctor, and I naturally allowed nobody to look after her except myself. There was a compulsory truce in our conjugal relations, very different from what might have resulted from a few days' absence, for we had discovered that separation, if but for an afternoon, brought us back to each other more passionate than before. This time, however, we were together and inseparate, but the tyranny of desire failed to penetrate into the room we shared, for Sophie had fallen victim to that formidable law, that love is perhaps stronger than death but sickness is stronger than love. The old historians tell of a saint who, when tempted by the lure of a naked woman, bit off his tongue and thus subjugated his desire, but I came to the conclusion at that time that no such drastic measure was required to chasten the most passionate of women ; illness suffices.

By reciprocity, the effect was just as decisive on me too. I have remarked elsewhere that the proximity of illness harasses and upsets me,

and this time sickness was attacking the one person whose buoyant health had ever been a delight to me, and wounding her moreover in the very citadel of her womanhood. My mind was instantaneously purged of all sensual thoughts, and the slightest allusion to love during those hours that I cared for and watched over the woman who incarnated love for me, would have been torture. Sophie became my sick sister, since I felt an intense tenderness towards her, deeper than any she had ever inspired in me, but she ceased to be the object of my desire and—how shall I express so subtle and strange a feeling?—it sometimes gave me real pain to see with my eyes and touch with my fingers that body whose love-fever had scorched mine and that was now no more than a poor hurt thing.

That truce had been very precious and done a great deal of good to us both if it had only interrupted our frenzy and caused us to bathe our love in the reviving fountain of abnegation and fraternity in suffering. Unfortunately its primary effect was to dissipate my intoxication, for lucidity returned to me with continence, and in the course of the hours spent beside my drowsy and ailing wife, the thread of my thoughts that I had succeeded in chasing from my mind that memorable morning at Marseilles, knitted up anew. Those thoughts came back to me throbbing like an awakening pain

when the sedative is beginning to lose its effect, despite my efforts to get away from and rid myself of them by such violent injunctions addressed to myself as, "This is absurd. I will not think. I forbid myself to reflect on this matter"; just as a monk might do when obsessed by some doubt. There were times when my effort of will gained the upper hand until a fissure would appear in the factitious wall of my mind and the banished idea would start to filter through in steadily increasing volume and I would suddenly find myself submerged in my trouble once more. As continence and isolation had recreated me into the lucid and normal person I naturally am, I did not take long to realize that attempts at escape were vain and dangerous and that it would be better to turn the face to the enemy. I mean to say that instead of defending my thoughts against the obsessing problem, I faced it and attacked it with all the strength of my thoughts. I came to a working arrangement with my nerves—thanks probably to the silence and the intimate and tender atmosphere of the sickroom—that the attack should be conducted without overmuch discomfort to myself.

"Let us separate," I thus reasoned with myself, "all that is genuine and real at the bottom of my present trouble from what is hypothetical or imaginary."

"The genuine and real can be fined down to

very little. A naval doctor, whose scientific knowledge is probably not wonderful beyond the care he has to mete out to his sailors, expressed a view, or rather threw out a criticism on the way Robert Moret was treated. He was astonished that recourse had not been had to a surgeon, and seemed not to approve of the treatment with drugs that Sophie had adopted from the very start and intensified in proportion as the end drew near. It resolves itself therefore into one doctor's opinion against another's without admitting the fact that the criticized practitioner is a woman whilst the criticism is levelled at her by a man. It should also be noted that the latter is a stranger who knows nothing either of the origin or the progress of the disease, that he scarcely saw the invalid for five minutes and even then when the latter was unconscious."

"Those are the facts. I am unused to alarming myself or seeking, as do some folks I know, for arguments to fret over, so how could so slight a happening have been able to disturb me so deeply and still continue to do so, for I *am* disturbed by persistent restlessness, a fact I cannot neglect since it will not leave me alone."

(It goes without saying that my reflections had not the consecutive character that I am decking them with as I write, but I am summarizing them in order to make matters clearer. In reality my thoughts were going and coming

without any real order, leaving me alternately buoyed up or discouraged. Yet in the midst of such apparent disorder my critical sense was extremely keen and was striving to clear up the chaos. The present result is what remained after the tidying-up, the little heap of pure metal that the secker accumulates after hours of washing and filtering.)

"I have therefore two facts in front of me ; a stranger's suggestions lacking real foundation, and a deep anxiety resulting from such suggestions. How to explain so vast an effect from so small a cause, granted that I am a fairly normal and lucid man ? I am beginning to glimpse the reason and must put it to myself brutally without reserve."

"What worries me is not to know whether Sophie treated Robert according to the highest principles of science, admitting that she might have made an error such as any medical man would be liable to. No ! What worries me is quite a different question and that question can be expressed thus. If the treatment was not what it should have been, was it through ignorance or lack of skill on the physician's part or because the physician, being perfectly capable and clever, willed that it should be so ?"

"On the day of her visit to my flat, while she was still Robert's companion, Sophie's words to me were 'Suffering uselessly, suffering to win death. If such a thing were to happen to



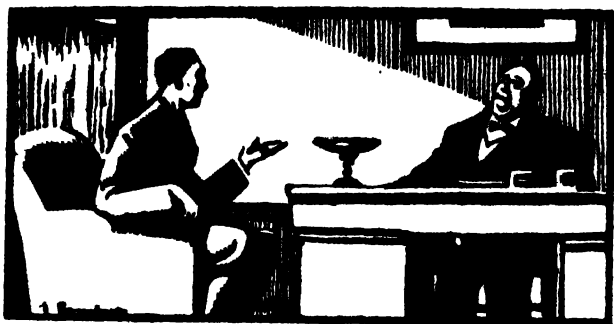
me, I swear I will not await the gnawings of pain.' Did she not resolutely apply to Robert the treatment she would have applied to herself, and that in accordance with her conscience ? ”

The question was put and it was sufficient to put it for it to be answered in the negative, for without seeking in any way to delude myself, I replied, “ No. Sophie did not act thus, for she is too just and kind-hearted.” The real significance of the very sentence she had uttered and that I had been vaguely conscious of in my memory stood out, now that I ventured to repeat its words, for she had meant that she did not recognize the right to treat others as she would do herself.

I recollect that at the moment that evidence flashed through my mind, I got up from the desk where I had been making pretence of writing and crept to my wife's bedside, where she appeared to be asleep, with her face turned to the wall. I bent over the masses of her hair, and as I have frequently observed at those periods when the eternal feminine wound reopened for her, its sensual odour was dulled, yet I laid my lips to those tresses and experienced a certain tender pleasure in that kiss that had nothing carnal about it. Without moving, she murmured, “ Ah ! how happy I am ! ” If she were not asleep, there was no slightest flicker of her eyelids, but the exclamation that

slipped from her lips corresponded so exactly with the evolution of my thoughts that once more I gleaned the impression that I was able to conceal nothing from my companion's divination.





## XI

SOPHIE's malady soon passed from her, and in a short while all pain had left her, but she still required a good deal of care and nursing. Such is the mystery of our human frame that our enforced continence lay lightly on two beings who could not have been alone together a few days before without thinking impure thoughts, but who now cheerfully remained chaste. The waking hours we spent together were exceedingly pleasant, for they were spent in a common task that linked us together. This was the long delayed scrutiny of the papers, works and notes that Robert had entrusted to our care—a work we had postponed until now, realizing our incapacity, for neither the intense and quasi-divine passion of our months of travel nor the sentimental folly that had heralded our return

was in any way compatible with thorough and disinterested endeavour. Now on the contrary the work attracted and was precious to us, as though our two minds that had been slightly separated before despite our bodily union, got to know each other and were wedded through our task that furnished a permanent subject for conversation and occasional altercation. In it I found occasion to admire Sophie's sound intellect and penetration, and she herself seemed surprised at my faculty for adapting myself to problems of philosophy and science that are by no means a speciality of mine, for I possess a clear mind that is not very ready at conception but quick to thorough comprehension once it is applied to a definite subject. Those sheets covered with our Robert's handwriting brought him back between us, for it was his thoughts of yesterday that animated the pages, and his hand, still warm in life, that had handled the paper our fingers touched and our eyes saw. There is a something in the writing of a dear and recently lost being that seems to resuscitate him quite otherwise than an object that may have belonged to him or clothes that he wore. Transmission between the brain that thought and the dried ink of the characters, was once direct, as between a face and the photographic negative, for a manuscript is the snapshot of a thought. In the spiritual crisis we were passing through I shall not be exaggerating or

plagiarizing if I state that Robert Moret was alive in spirit between the two of us.

How then should I not have observed Sophie or watched her attitude when I saw her as deeply moved as I was myself by a similar sentiment of admiration and piety? Certainly there was still the same reserve in the expression of her feelings, the same immobility of features, and those eyes whose gaze became unbearable as soon as one tried to fathom it, but there was no faintest embarrassment in recalling Robert's illness, nursing and last hours, and I often felt so humiliated over my recent anxiety that I should doubtless have thrown myself at my wife's feet to beg her pardon if it had not been just as impossible to make a confession to Sophie as to ask one of her!

In that state of moral placidity, I refrained from rooting out the very core of the problem that had obsessed me, but, being no longer in fear of it, I did not prevent myself contemplating it. What a pity it was, I considered, that I could not straightway put the question to my wife that was intriguing me and ask, "Why not have called in a surgeon for a consultation over Robert and why have treated him, as you did, with increasing doses of anæsthetics?" I was confident that she would easily and successfully answer the question, but I neither dared nor had the strength to ask it. I was afraid of hurting her and lest she scent suspicion in what

was after all but a legitimate need for information.

With the same placid clearness I discovered that at all costs I must not leave this point unexplained, or else I should risk once more falling a prey to my obsession. The obscure point was after all in the region of medical science, and not being able to question Sophie, I found myself with the choice of two plans, both equally within my reach since Sophie, although convalescent, was unable to get out and made me take an hour's walk daily for exercise; either to consult a specialist or a medical book of reference. I inclined rather to the latter course, for though it was the more laborious and would entail three or four visits to the Library of the School of Medicine, yet it was the more secret of the two and appeared, why I know not, as a less serious infraction of conjugal trust. As frequently occurs, I postponed my visit to the Library from day to day until eventually Sophie informed me that she was feeling fit enough to take a short outing in my company in the Park on the morrow, and I discovered I had just time for a consultation with a specialist that very day.

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There could be no question about the choice of the specialist, for in Paris there lives a great

surgeon whose learning and skill are as renowned as his professional standing; a well-known professor and author of the leading works on surgery. As he never mixed in society, I had never met him, and certainly my face, and probably my name as well, were unknown to him. I soon found his name in the directory, and not having arranged an appointment in the customary way, I adopted the method that diplomacy had taught me was infallible and slipped a couple of hundred-franc notes into his butler's hand, telling him that it was absolutely essential that I should see his master without delay. The man quickly recovered his equanimity after the shock and took me into the dining-room, where I spent some ten minutes examining specimens of the doctor's collection of porcelain, before the butler returned to lead me to the consulting-room, assuring me on the way that he had passed me over the heads of five patients in the waiting-room.

Here I was confronted with a plump little man with worn face, tired eyes and bad teeth, who might have been my age, fifty, sixty, or maybe more. After a curt greeting, he made me sit down in a chair beside his desk, and sitting down in his turn, waited for me to speak, for he was compelled no doubt to take care of his vocal chords, having to talk to patients all through the afternoon.

I had the name of one of my former secretaries all ready in my mind in case he should require mine, but since he asked no questions, I refrained from mentioning it but plunged forthwith into the recital I had prepared for the occasion.

"Professor, I've come to consult you on the subject of a person who is very dear to me—a woman. The doctor attending her has diagnosed her case as a cancer of the left tonsil and I myself have felt the swelling with my finger. The patient, however, knows nothing of the truth and is under the impression that she is suffering from swollen glands, but I'm well aware that she would dread an operation as she is nervous and restless and somewhat neurasthenic. I've only a limited amount of confidence in the doctor in charge of the case, an ordinary local practitioner, so . . . I thought of seeking your advice, purely theoretical naturally, for the doctor in question shall not know that I've been to see you."

"You're at perfect liberty to tell him you've been here," replied the surgeon with a shrug of the shoulders. "I should not let you speak if I thought I were infringing professional etiquette; but in the first place you are not the invalid nor, moreover, are you asking me to see your friend, so there's no real reason for embarrassment on either part."

He expressed himself rather crudely but so



kindly that I was quite put at my ease and continued :

"Of the malady in question I only know what everyone else seems to know to-day—that it is no longer looked upon as incurable, that science has made prodigious strides, and that radium can be utilized. I've also read some of your articles on the subject, Professor."

"Oh, my articles!" he interrupted. "Of course I never put any inaccuracies in those I write for the public in the great reviews and even refrain from stating as certain what is as yet uncertain, but you must understand there are different ways of expressing oneself, and I spice my utterances with a great deal of optimism, otherwise I might be hurting people's feelings."

He had been talking with his head bent, but now straightened up and his eyes, that before had seemed to me tired, gleamed like a lamp whose wick has been turned up.

"You are evidently a man who has studied a great deal, and you will understand me. The ~~actually~~ theory of cancer is easy to realize, like all theories, even Einstein's, but it's hard to explain really well without digression or dilution. Listen to me, There are three stages in the malady. The first is a little tumour, a small ulcer or some sore spot where the fatal cells gain a foothold. By taking away the flesh surrounding the spot, you remove the cells and it's

all over\*, finished, you understand, so far as that particular spot is concerned, and it will not infect any other part. The patient may be said to be cured."

"But," I exclaimed, "how can one tell—?"

"Ah! that's just the point. Every time you have a persistent or abnormal pain or swelling, or some strange irritation, think immediately of cancer, and go and see a doctor. That's a fact that ought to be widely known, posted up in every school, and put on postmarks instead of the rubbish one sees there at present. Then we go on to the second stage. The patient has either noticed nothing, not worried about things or consulted a doctor who is an ignoramus—for unfortunately there are quite a few such in our profession—who has comforted him with the assurance that it's eczema, acne or a slight hardening of the skin, or some similar nonsense and prescribed an ointment. Meanwhile the cancerous cells, that care nothing for ointments, have multiplied and the lymph—you know what that is? a liquid to be found in the tissues—has carried some of the cells into the lymphatic ganglions, sometimes quite a long distance away from the original seat, ten or twenty centimetres or maybe a whole yard away. Yes, Sir, there are cancerous cells that travel from the foot to the groin and create fresh seats of the disease there."

"It's dreadful," I murmured, as in my mind's

eye I pictured Robert stretched out on his sofa, and the tragical irradiation of the death-bearing cells through his poor, worn body.

"Yes," repeated the professor, "it's dreadful, and yet the surgeon can still save the patient by attacking and wiping out the multiple seats of the disease. I calculate I have thus saved one sufferer in three—yes, at least one in three in the second stage—and the two I couldn't save, had at least a few months' reprieve from death."

He looked me straight in the eyes and in his I read that passion for healing and saving, that violent energy of the man who delights in fighting death.

"Once past that stage," he continued, "the disease is stronger than we are in the present state of surgery. This is what happens. The cancerous cells continue to multiply and travel without the slightest regularity. Cases of arrest and recovery have been known but they're very rare, and generally speaking, the periplus enlarges. If the cells reach the thoracic channel, they penetrate from there into the veins and then it's all over, for the circulation carries them into the liver, heart and lungs. The infection becomes general and the patient is doomed."

"But then," I objected, "if I've understood you rightly, all this takes time, and between the first and second stages the doctor may have been able to distinguish."

"If the doctor is perspicacious, he can generally summon the surgeon in time and then, I repeat, the operation has a good chance of success; but wait a bit! The movement of the cancerous cells has no fixed time-table, and there is danger as soon as they set out. Moreover, I ought to tell you that there are some cases that are frightful, appalling, and those occur when the cells, instead of travelling by the ganglions and the thoracic channel, take a short cut and penetrate into the veins close to the seat of the malady. What is the matter? You needn't worry, for such cases are extremely rare."

I stopped him as he was just getting up to come to my assistance, thinking I was feeling unwell.

"There's nothing the matter, doctor. Please forgive me," I said.

For a brief moment I had been unable to restrain my feelings, and the cause of this was quite different from what he surmised it to be. This type of case that immediately became hopeless through an inrush of cells to the veins, was Robert's case exactly. From that moment, judgment was given for Sophie against Viécourt in my mind, and I seemed all of a sudden to be breathing a freer, cleaner atmosphere.

"It's such a rare case," the professor repeated, "and there again the surgeon's intervention has its place between the moment when

the seat can be removed and the irruption of the cells into the circulation. That does not occur in the space of twenty-four hours, for *Natura non facit saltus*, as old Leibniz says. Well, do you think you've got all the information you require now?"

"On the malady itself, yes. The matter could not have been more clearly or concisely put, but there is another matter that tends to preoccupy those who have to look after a hopeless patient."

"Pain?"

I nodded.

"Pain!" he repeated thoughtfully. "Always that question is being put to us! There are some people who have an instinctive dread of the surgeon and who bargain with themselves, arguing whether it is better to drug themselves or lie on the operating table, like Guy de Maupassant's character who committed suicide rather than fight a duel."

"It's not quite those that I mean . . ."

"I understand. You mean those whom the operating table cannot save, but in nine cases out of ten it can prolong their lives, and what is called a cure is after all but a prolongation, for death lies in wait for all of us at the end of every cure."

"But then, if prolongation only means suffering?"

"Evidently. It is then that there enters the

terrible case of conscience. Less than a fortnight ago a beautiful young woman of the Spanish colony, mother of two children, came to see me, suffering from a neglected cancer of the left breast, for, as you perhaps know, the doctors in her country are not famed for their skill. General infection had commenced in her and she was having acute attacks of pain. I asked her whether she was a believer, and on her replying in the affirmative, I told her that she had better go and see her confessor. On another occasion last year, a man who was still young but incurable, a dreadful case, came to see me. He had no confessor, only his conscience, nor did he ask me to advise him, for his mind was made up. He merely questioned me as to the progress and probable duration of the malady. We had a long discussion and I put the case for the surgeon—that an operation must be beneficial as long as there is the hope of snatching another hour of life—but it's vain to argue with anyone who considers that he has the right to dispose of his own life."

I listened, so to speak, with the whole of my being. The intelligent, unbelieving and conscientious man under discussion could not have been Robert, since the latter had passed away, almost before my eyes, still ignorant of what complaint he was suffering from. But how well I could imagine him settling up his life that way if he had known all !

The professor had laid both his hands flat on the table, with fingers drumming on some papers, whilst his eyes had recovered their look of weariness.

"For my part, whether I've a knife in my hand or am administering an anæsthetic, I make it a point to have one sole unvarying object in view—to cure or prolong. Has one the right to choose for oneself between pain and life? That is the question that concerns the patient, but no one has less right than the doctor to choose for anyone else. Such is my formal opinion and I sincerely believe that most doctors think the same as I do about it."

"Then, in practice . . ."

"In practice, it becomes a question of dosage, for one certainly can't leave a patient in agony, but the maximum of life must be kept in him, whilst rendering that life just bearable. Any other doctrine would have a tendency to finish off some patients, according to the usages of savage peoples."

He lapsed into silence and I got up, remarking, "I'm very much obliged to you, Doctor." At the same time I laid on the table an envelope whose contents the great man did not deign to glance at. For the last time he lifted his eyes to mine, and this time they were lit up with a smile.

"I have an impression that you are feeling less anxious than before our interview. Am I right?"

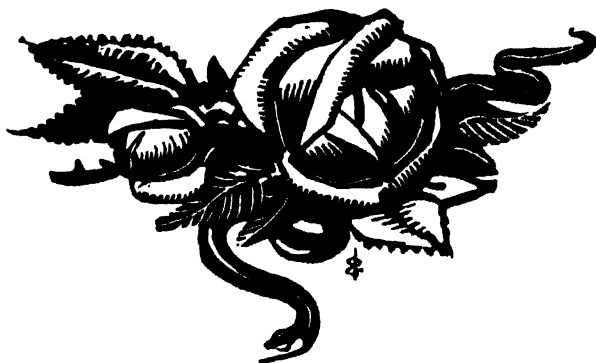
"Quite right, Doctor."

"Then I must admit that I'm at a loss to understand things, for what I've told you is hardly pleasant. I'm beginning to wonder whether you're not an author gathering information for some plot?"

This time it was my turn to smile, but I made him no answer.

"That's your right," concluded the doctor. "But now I've been letting my tongue run away with me for too long and it's time I should get back to real consultations."

We thereupon shook hands and I left.







## XII

It is remarkable how progressive is the sequence of our feelings, our thoughts, and everything about us. In my own person I have many a time verified that way of thinking and feeling—by stages, so to speak. When something worries me and engages all my attention for a short time, I receive the impression that once that obstacle is overcome, the going will be easier and the road clear ahead, but in reality the thing is just a mirage, for scarcely is the first obstacle put behind me than I catch sight of another that was concealed from me by the first one, and that I had no conception of. That is doubtless the way of life, right up to the very last obstacle of all—Death.

In my present case I was still unable to visualize any fresh obstacle ahead of me, to take the place of the one the specialist had

lately removed, and was complacently digesting that formula of his—"There are terrible cases, when the cells break into the veins close to the very seat of the disease." That was Robert's case exactly, for the rapidity of evolution between the discovery of the complaint and the patient's death were proof of this, and Sophie had quite rightly considered that it was not a case for operation. As to her employment of anæsthetics, I had satisfied myself that my friend's condition called for this, since I had myself felt called upon to administer an injection to him. "It's all a question of dosage," the great surgeon had declared, and neither Viécourt nor I was really qualified to judge Sophie on that point.

"So," thought I to myself, as I regained our home at Passy, "all is quite clear and Viécourt must be an ignorant fellow, as the professor said. There's an end then to my wretched nightmare, and all life lies before me again and I'm carefree, though I still feel naturally somewhat distraught as a result of my bad dreams!"

Such was my state of mind when I arrived, and all the time during lunch and the drive I took with Sophie in the Bois. The convalescence of the year coincided with the returning strength of my wife, for it was one of those Parisian afternoons when it appears that a slight blue haze hovers between the sky and ourselves, above the lawns and trees parading

their new greenery. We were practically alone in the Avenues, for the Bois is deserted during the springtime in those hours following the midday meal, and we encountered no one at all in the alley where we strolled slowly side by side, Sophie leaning on my arm. The warmth of her beloved form penetrated into me without exciting any desire whatsoever, for I realized that she was still very weak and to be cared for, but my heart throbbed with a need for tenderness and also the need for humiliation and self-accusation. It hurt me, too, that she must always remain in ignorance of the fact that my faith in her had failed, and yet I should never be able to tell her. As for Sophie, she spoke little and I attributed her silence to the effort needed to make her first steps after being laid up for so long, and certainly as it was she was very soon fatigued and proposed that we should make our way back to our carriage. Thus it came about that a sort of melancholy marred our pleasant drive, but I refused to take any notice of it, forcing myself to recapitulate the reasons I possessed for serenity and contentment, in that Sophie was better and my black anxieties vanished. All the same, I instinctively dreaded being left alone with my dismal spirit of inward investigation and stayed close to my wife all the afternoon. We worked together at classifying Robert's notes, first until dinner-time and then afterwards until it was time for Sophie to

retire to bed. Flaubert knew what he was talking about when he wrote that "work is the best way of getting through life."

I have remarked that our married life was very narrow. We certainly had two rooms communicating with each other, each provided with a bed, but since our marriage it had never occurred to us to sleep apart, and the second room was becoming by way of a joke to the servants, my man periodically asking me with ironical gravity whether the sheets on my bed really needed to be changed. Even Sophie's illness had not altogether altered our custom, and every day a camp bed was put up for me alongside the bigger bed.

All through the first week of my wife's convalescence I did not leave her for a single instant for it seemed to me that her presence—seeing her and hearing her voice—assured the continuity of the calm I had recaptured with such difficulty. That calm persisted indeed, but I am too accustomed to retiring within myself, and listen too constantly to the words of my heart not to feel even then how precarious was that calm. I too was convalescent—but in a different way from her—and lived in fear of a relapse, especially when it was time to go to sleep, for at such times, near as she was to me, it seemed as though her protective influence waned as she lost consciousness. And then I'm not afraid of the darkness as some children are

who dread the appearance of a ghost. My fear was not of spirits, but of my own spirit. It was as though it were controlled all day long by my strength of will and governed by my lucid reasoning, but at night I lost control of some part of it that possessed an imaginative and guessing faculty of singular acuteness and power that fought against me and always ended up by getting the better of me. During the nights at Montpellier, when I alone was awake between Robert who was doped, and Sophie worn out with weariness and nursing, I knew for the first time that I was in love with Sophie and she with me. The Marseilles night had revealed to me for the first time the intimate danger that menaced our fulfilled love. Yes, I'm afraid of night, and during that fragile convalescence of soul that followed my visit to the specialist I never stretched myself on my bed beside Sophie's without a feeling of anguish, and would only fall asleep after I had reached out my arm and taken her fingers in mine, for I felt that my anxiety was only temporarily numbed or blinded but not defeated or killed, that it was lying in wait for me and would attack me again, I was sure, during some not very far distant night,

In effect, one night, sleep refused to slip from Sophie's fingers into mine and thence into the whole of my being, and I finally ended by releasing her inert fingers and putting both my

hands to my forehead. There was complete darkness surrounding me, but my spiritual vision was still able to make out the outlines of the fresh obstacle ahead, that I had had a vague presentiment of for some days, an obstacle as redoubtable and difficult as that other from which the specialist's visit had freed me.

The professor had comforted me by proving to my satisfaction that any doctor would have treated Robert as he had been treated, and had not failed in professional duty or therapeutic knowledge. Against such a doctor, I had no claim by either suspicion or rancour, and had complacently come to the conclusion that Sophie was justified. Well, it was all absurd. In that fight so well depicted by the specialist—the choice between the patient's agony and death—the average doctor had only his professional scruples to safeguard. If then he should have neglected or transgressed them, it could only be through perverse caprice on his part since he had no interests to serve. Sophie, on the other hand, was no ordinary doctor where Robert was concerned. Her eyes were opened on her bridal night in her young love's dream, and almost on the morrow she met another man who on her own admission, incarnated that dream. Whilst she had no hesitation in proposing to him that she sever her first union and belong to him, he had refused whilst confessing that he loved her; had

refused whilst imprudently letting it be understood that he would persist in his refusal so long as the other man was alive. Strangely enough, almost immediately after that occurrence, her companion's illness altered in aspect and assumed that of intoxication by anæsthetics, and further, after an interval of unforeseen brevity, attained the only conclusion that could accord with the desires of the lady doctor in charge of the case! It was not indeed on my present suspicious anxieties that I ought to dwell but far rather on my inertia and my blindness at the time. Why had I not spoken out while there was still time, spoken to Sophie or spoken to Robert? Would it have been such a surprising or out-of-the-way thing that the patient's lifelong friend and spiritual brother should have asked for, demanded, that another doctor should be called in in consultation? Was I not myself guilty through sheer refraining, and what excuse could I plead? Fear of upsetting Robert? That had been better than abandoning him. Fear of annoying Sophie? Then it was pure sentimental cowardice on my part, unless . . .

Unless . . .

For the first time the veil that concealed the chasm of my trouble ripped across and what I thought I could see terrified me. My inertia and my cowardice in that circumstance, would not a magistrate be tempted to call them by a

different name? Was it not through sheer complacency that I had interpreted in Sophie's favour that extraordinary utterance, "Suffering uselessly, suffering to attain death! If such a thing were to happen to me, I swear I would not wait for the gnawings of pain!" It could be interpreted in exactly the reverse sense, but how was I not to shudder when recalling her other words spoken on the same day, "The living must not be sacrificed for the dead!" I myself had heard that and had not protested or been disturbed over it in any way. Ah! we were accomplices indeed, silent accomplices who had acted in concert without formulating our agreement, but accomplices for all that, aspiring to the same end, each according to his temperament and principles . . .

"No! no!" I stammered almost aloud, as I sat up in my bed. "It's not true. I didn't..."

The sound of my own voice recalled me to reality and I listened in the darkness with racing heart, but there was nothing to be heard. My wife, in the next bed to me, did not stir, nor could I even hear her breathing. Her sleep, always of a light nature at the best of times, had become very uncertain during her illness, so she ensured it every evening with a few drops of a narcotic that rendered her insensible to any kind of noise especially during the earlier part of the night. What was I to do? My agitation was so great that I got out of bed and switched



on the nearest light with the idea of awakening the sleeper and immediately putting her through an examination that I could take no exception to, but the light, with its penetrating strength of reality, cleared my brain, yet without calming me. To tear that invalid from her sleep by shaking her and then without warning to put her to the question, would have been the act of a lunatic or a tormentor, and I immediately realized the impossibility of it all. On the other hand, I felt myself no less capable of carrying on the frightful vigil I had started throughout the whole night, and the open bed from which I had just emerged assumed the aspect of a rack or some similar instrument of torture. Just at that moment I caught sight of the little bottle of narcotic on Sophie's bedside table, from which she was accustomed to take thirty drops, so seizing it, I swallowed what seemed to me to approximate a dose, and turning out the light, got back into bed, feeling that sleep was coming to me at last.

\* \* \* \*

I remember having once read a story with scientific pretensions where the hero went to sleep one night provided with a certain personality, and woke up on the following morning disguised with an entirely different one, amongst folk who seemed to know him, but

whom he could not recollect ever having set eyes on before. Such a sickness of personality is but the imagination of a dreamer, but who has not observed in himself that one rarely wakes up quite the same as when one went to sleep? The insensible stage we cover every night cannot be measured like daytime, for sometimes it is as short as a single step, but occasionally its imaginary time encloses all the events of a long journey. Before going to sleep, one's memory was seeking some name in vain, but that name is there as soon as one wakes up. A certain problem was worrying the scientist's mind, but, with the return of daylight, the problem is solved. Some anxiety was torturing us on the threshold of sleep, but morning's light seems to have altered the colour of the future that we march on towards, feeling vastly comforted. If, on the other hand, the mysterious nightly stage brings you on awakening, to further anxiety and presentiment of some menace that was not threatening you the previous night, it is always, you will find, because you can see more clearly, better distinguish the outline of things, because forgotten matters have returned to your mind, and unperceived mysteries have been disclosed—all this was happening whilst your personality was but a shadow of itself: No, indeed! No one wakes up quite the same as he was the night before. We can scarcely notice the change in the

ordinary course of peaceful months, yet how suddenly it bursts upon us at critical moments in our lives !

I had experienced it that morning at Marseilles when the mysterious council of the night before had precipitated me—to escape from the arguments of my reason—into a frenzy of conjugal voluptuousness. This time, on awaking later than usual not far away from Sophie who was still wrapped in heavy sleep, I no longer experienced the agitation of insomnia, or the slightest temptation to shake the sleeper and question her. Question her indeed ! Did I not know in advance that it would only thicken the veil of the secret between us ? On the contrary, my desire was to not upset her or speak to her before gathering my wits together in solitude. That was, I think, the first morning since our marriage that I had not bent over her bed and kissed her. Hurriedly slipping out of the room, I dressed without calling any of the servants, and only summoned the chambermaid when I was ready to go out, bidding her go into her mistress's room at the usual time.

“ You will tell her I've had a 'phone call and been obliged to go out. Ask her not to worry, for I've been sent for by my old chief at the Quai d'Orsay. I'll be back by lunch time ! ”

I sought for no more likely excuse or pretext,

for I knew full well that Sophie would not believe me, and that it was merely a question of keeping up appearances before the servants.

I needed solitude and meditation, and the mere fact of crossing the threshold of my house and feeling the macadam of the street under my feet relieved me. I had no hesitation in choosing my direction, for from Passy I went as far as the Seine and the Champ de Mars, and thence towards Vaugirard and the South of Paris.

The weather was dry, clearer and colder than the day before, with the soil lacking dampness and very suitable for walking. As it was barely nine o'clock, Paris was exhibiting that busy gaiety imparted to her in fine weather by the crowds of men and women going to their work, and housekeepers and servants attacking the food stores. Stepping out briskly like a man going to some important meeting, I walked in the midst of that humble throng along the Boulevards that link up Grenelle with the Montparnasse Quarter and then slope down from the Terminus in the direction of Montrouge.

I could not have said what I expected from my tryst. A spiritualist might have affirmed that a voice from the beyond was calling me, but unfortunately, owing to my mental habits and the realistic tendencies of my education, I am about the last person in the world to have any leanings towards Spiritualism. With one

dead person alone who was dear to me—my father, whom I had lost just after attaining manhood—had I frequently and recently happened to converse and I was aware, alas ! that there was no supernatural influence in this matter. I realized that the replies that seemed to issue from that mouth, now closed for ever, were a kind of pious imagery nourished by the memories I retained of the dead, memories so lasting, numerous and vivid, that at each sentence from me, the answer arose from the depths of myself, as though it had indeed been sent from another world. To-day, on commencing to catch sight of the cypresses and larches of the Montparnasse Cemetery over the garden walls, I asked myself with some measure of surprise, “I loved Robert as tenderly as I loved my father. How then is it that I’ve never conversed with him since his death?” I hastened my steps in that direction, as though the commencement of our talk could only take place on the very spot where rested the imperishable remains of my friend.

How rapidly the people of the dead colonize the spaces that the living yield to it. I experienced some difficulty in finding again—amongst so many new ones that had arisen in its neighbourhood—the simple monument that I remembered as standing alone on the edge of a vast empty space, like some advanced post, a modest marble stele with a bronze relief shaped

like a big medallion encrusted in it, representing Robert's profile executed by a good artist from a photograph. An inscription on a horizontal stone forming the base bore names and dates but nothing more. Fourteen months had elapsed since I last stood by that stone, for the first six of which I might be excused since thousands of miles separated me from Paris, and I had taken every precaution that the grave should be well tended. Two baskets of wall-flowers and stocks attested the florist's conscientious exactitude. But I had no excuse for absenting myself all through the last autumn and the long winter that was just now yielding before the attack of spring. With aching heart I seated myself on the side of an empty and earthy gardener's barrow that was standing on the pathway just beside the monument, doubtless deserted by its owner who had gone off to have his breakfast. There I sat and, fixing my eyes on the bronze plaque, I let my thoughts lead me where they willed, and quite naturally began to speak to Robert, conscious nevertheless that it was only a more vivid form of my meditation and that I was really talking to myself.

"My friend and brother, I come to you in despair. Black night reigns in my conscience, and I've begun to have doubts of my reason and my pleasure in life, and thence to doubts of myself has been but a short step. I'm on the

horns of a dilemma, my dear old friend. Either I've been a bad friend to you, by imprudently relaxing all control over your interests and the very defence of your life ; or else I've preferred to see nothing and purposely put my perspicacity to sleep. No, Robert, it's not that, is it ? I, who was unwilling that Sophie should tell you the whole truth, for fear lest you should suffer ; I, who stood by you faithfully to your last hours, I did not give my consent that your life should be in any way shortened, I was not an accomplice to that, I swear to you ! ”

With head in hands, I fell a-sobbing, relieved for the instant by that physical breakdown and the flood of tears I made no effort to check. I even lost the power to continue that mournful prayer I was offering up to a shadow, for what was the use of it ? There was nothing resembling a reply, either from the depths of his tomb nor from the depths of my soul, so through sheer lack of effort and thought, I let myself be buffeted like any woman or child, by the nerve storm that swept over me—salty warmth of tears, spasms of sobbing, and those inarticulate sounds that spring from a convulsed throat, what mercy of Providence substitutes you at times for silent agony, dumb pain and the dire tyranny of thoughts ?

“ Sir . . . Excuse me, please, Sir . . . ”

The man had to tap me on the shoulder, gently at first and then more roughly, to arouse

me from my abstraction and cause me to look up. What did he want, this old man in the blue apron, who smelled of stale wine and mould, and kept touching me with his earth-stained hands?

"Excuse me, Sir, please . . . That's my barrow you're sitting on."

Remembering where I was, I got up quickly, and I suppose I must have looked the living picture of human woe and desolation, for the ancient man sought out some word of comfort in his dull brain and finally came out with :

"Ah, Sir, I see a lot of it here, you may believe me, a lot of sad sights. It takes some courage, it does !"

Shrugging his shoulders, he bent down to the handles of his barrow and moved away, pushing it in front of him. The hub of the wheel whined softly round its metal axle and the gardener's steps scanned that monotonous melody, whilst I remained standing before the humble tomb, weeping no longer but with my brain as empty as though my every thought had departed with my tears. My lips, however, were still moving mechanically, and I discovered that they were muttering bits of prayers I had learned long since and often repeated during my childhood at my father's knees, for he was religiously inclined—long neglected prayers, but which my memory seemed to have kept in reserve to supplement my failing will.



I made no attempt to stop when I realized what I was doing, but already memory was getting shy, the sentences of the ritual were escaping me, and it was with difficulty that I reached the end of that strange invocation.

“What am I doing here?” I murmured aloud. “Even in front of this grave I can find no echo of his thoughts within myself!”





### XIII

I REGAINED the entrance by the narrow paths that wound between the graves, and as I crossed the threshold of the City of Death, I was fortunate enough to catch sight of a woman in mourning paying off a cab, which I took and asked the driver to take me home. I had a splitting headache and was feeling thoroughly run down, but my anxiety was certainly less than when I had left the house, and little by little during my slow progress homewards, it seemed to me as though the influence of my dead friend floated around me. Indeed Robert's wisdom, the equity of his mind and his marvellous faculty for casting on one side all passion in order to judge others—all the fine attributes I had admired in him for years—their deep and distant features began to glimmer once more in my memory.

"My beloved brother," thought I, "too much have I permitted love of woman to invade and completely possess me. I've not forgotten you, but I've not suffered sufficiently from lack of you, through having been able to find happiness for myself without you."

Meditating thus, I suddenly felt in me the birth of the answer he would have made, had he been there to do so.

"Gather your happiness, poor human being, and don't stop to argue with shadows! Conscience, like intellect, lights up a small area of ourselves. Beyond starts the twilight and further still night. Don't try to penetrate that darkness. I fully realize that you loved me dearly and would have restored me to health had it lain in your power, and that if your lover's selfishness had any ideas of revolt, you would certainly not have consented. Don't crucify yourself because you've been lucky enough to glean the happiness my hands could not grasp."

"All that," I exclaimed aloud, "is being uttered by myself, for I'm pleading my own cause. It's all just mirage! In reality, it's fresh proof to me of my complicity."

Mirage or not, I certainly felt that my will was recovering its power.

"This very day," I resolved, "I'll have a talk with Sophie, for the present state of affairs in both our lives cannot possibly go on."

I began immediately to realize that I should shortly be confronting my wife, who would not, I was confident, say a word about my morning's outing, but I did not feel in myself that I was capable of such restraint, and as my cab reached the Esplanade des Invalides, I gave myself a clear proof of my timidity and moral weakness by telling the driver to pull up in front of the Foreign Office.

Being pretty familiar with the topography of the place, and moreover recognized by the porters, I found my way through the corridors to the office occupied by my old chief, who welcomed me with every sign of surprise and friendship.

"Hello, so you're back again, Mr. Deserter. Many a time have I thought of writing to you and sending for you, for I've often missed you, especially in London ten months ago. But I respected your long honeymoon, young husband, and everyone knows how jealously you're guarding your felicity. Still, I once managed to catch sight of you both at the theatre, and after that I understood your reasons!"

Our conversation went on in this tone of worldly affability, soon coming down to the political difficulties of the hour. As my old chief talked on, I stressed the attention with which I listened to him by a few replies but was inwardly telling myself:

"All this makes me feel as though I were visiting a shop full of dusty old theatre-scenery. How is it that such an intelligent person cannot perceive that he and his like have no lasting effect on events and are merely acting the part of the chorus in ancient drama, maybe an even less important rôle? This, life? Never in the world! I am suffering and on my way over the edge of things, but at least I've lived and am still alive!"

Despite all this, my call at the Quai d'Orsay—so lowering to my dignity, since I had only sought in it occasion for rather contemptible mental restriction—had the effect of airing my brain, so that when I reached home, I looked and felt quite normal or thereabouts. My wife calmly and naturally informed me that she was feeling very fit and considered herself now quite cured, and that during my absence she had continued alone the task of putting Robert's papers in order.

"I felt up to it," she told me. "With the exception of these notes that have no obvious reference and that we kept on one side, all is now classified and numbered, with an index, in the four folders. It will only take about an hour to finish off the whole lot."

All through our lunch together, she went on chatting about her work easily and clearly, and when I thought the occasion was ripe to tell her of my visit to the Quai d'Orsay, she did

not appear to doubt me, and even smiled at my chief's remark concerning her, that I told her of.

"That man is quite right, I think," said she. "I've separated you too much, I'm afraid, from your friends and your life of former days. Being but a woman, I've been able to live for one being alone, but you, of course . . ."

She did not finish her sentence nor did I venture to enquire, "Are you talking of Robert, or if of me, do you consider our life together, our life of intimacy, as closed?" I asked no question nor did I protest, but those words of hers left a dreadful ache in my heart.

All the rest of the day was just as peaceful, just like any other day—our outing together, our work on Robert's papers, where we completed the revision and classification of the isolated notes, and our early dinner together—too peaceful indeed, and too like any other. As the close of the day drew near, my fear of the darkness descended on me again. The visit to the grave had pacified me, but my resolution to question Sophie was wavering. Should I dare, at our nightly tête-à-tête, to put her in a position to explain herself concerning a past whose doubts I could not longer endure? I felt that the hour had come and that no further delay could possibly be justified, yet the closer I got to the time I had fixed to speak out, the more I doubted being able to bring myself to broach the question.

After our evening meal was over, we passed into the room Sophie used as a sitting-room and that we usually called the purple drawing-room. It was her custom there, whilst I sat and smoked a cigarette—a custom her illness had interrupted for a few days—to seat herself at the piano and play from memory for herself and for me. No doubt it was her desire to signal her recovery by reviving that custom, and it was almost as though she were exerting herself to please me more than ever, for she played my favourite pieces over for me, one by one. I am not much use at music myself, but I understand it, and the pieces I instinctively prefer are of a classical nature and not such as might be beneath the notice of a connoisseur. Sophie played in succession the ninth study in Chopin's second book, the sixth dance from Granados, Boccherini's Minuet and a little thing of Beethoven's that always—why I know not—put me in a state of tender emotion and was called *Der treue Johnie* ! She played without virtuosity but with deep feeling, and no one I had ever heard could draw sounds from a piano as she could, to set my nerves quivering profoundly. Music has this effect on me, that it imparts extraordinary mobility to my thoughts, just as though each turn of melody and each bit of harmony exercise a special power of evocation and correspond to some fibre of my sensibility, to a reflection or an echo in my

memory. Sophie played, and listening to her, I gazed at her and the warmth of love flowed back into my heart once more. All my boyhood's dreams realized in that one being, the truly divine enthusiasm that had carried us away together from the moment we really belonged to each other; the voluntary submission to my spirit of that mind so superior to mine, in a kind of proud abnegation, and then too, our plunge together in the depths of physical happiness—all that by her, and all for me. And I, I was about to risk abdication, destruction, and renunciation, all for what? For an argument with shadows, as Robert's voice had lately assured me. Whatever the past, it was past in the sense that it was forgotten and dead, and against that nullity I was proposing to pit the most splendid reality; for that death I was planning to smash up two lives. No, decidedly No! My desire and strength for that were gone, for, after all, it was only a question of wishing, only a question of telling myself, "Whatever the past, I can do nothing to amend it, and I've not even the means of making certain. Even were I to know for sure, no one would be any better off for it, and both Sophie and myself would suffer dreadfully on account of it. I swear henceforth to put aside all that dangerous line of thought, just as a true Christian puts away any doubt regarding his faith. My life, my welfare, my duty and my virtue



are all incarnate in this being before me, who loves me and whom I love." Thus ran my sincere thoughts and I soon regained my normal resolution.

The maid opened the door to enquire, "Does Madame need me any more to-night?" and from where she sat at the piano, Sophie made a sign in the negative, for she always dressed and undressed alone, rarely even accepting assistance from my hands.

I heard the maid's footsteps growing fainter as she walked away, the closing of some distant shutter, and then Sophie finished the air she had started, an air that will ring through my ears as long as I live. I could not hear it now with any degree of calmness, nor should I dare try now to discover its name. Getting up from the music stool, she closed the piano noiselessly and came over to me. Her face was masklike as ever, but there was a feverish look in her eyes.

"My darling!" I murmured.

She did not reply immediately, but just stood and looked down at me, where I sat on a low sofa, and all of a sudden I had an intuition that the critical moment of our lives was at hand. My agitation became so great that my tongue, touching my dry palate and teeth, could utter no sound. Sophie sat down in a small armchair close to me and began:

"Antoine, you've got to listen to me. No!"

She made a gesture imposing silence on me. "Don't answer, at least not yet. You know what I'm like, that a single question is sufficient to deprive me of the power of going on, whereas if you don't question or interrupt me . . . so you won't, will you?"

I obediently refrained from uttering a word, but took both her hands and carried them to my lips. I do not think I had ever been so madly in love with her, and at such moments the need of pouring one's whole substance and mind into the other, and the impossibility of adequately expressing one's feelings, throw us on to the boundary-line between ecstasy and agony. She must have felt the shock of my feelings, for she herself could not speak for a while, being all shaken with a vibration I knew, but then she gently withdrew her hands and murmured:

"What slaves we are!" Words that I was not to understand fully until later. Then drawing back her chair, "You're unhappy," she went on. "Yes, I know you've been unhappy for a long time. Once more, please don't say anything, but let me alone do the talking, as I did on the day I came to see you at your flat, do you remember? And don't touch me, or you'll take all my strength away from me. You're unhappy. I felt it when it started without being able to guess the cause of it.

"It started on the day that you called in a

doctor, because you couldn't get Robert to wake up," she continued after a brief pause. "I noticed when I got in that you were agitated and disturbed on some other account than Robert's condition. It needed some sort of divination to find it out, since Viécourt did not open his lips in my presence, but now I know what was worrying you—it was not having confided in me what he had said. From that moment something in you was parted from me, you've been watching me, but you didn't dare tell me anything and your silence has been my accomplice. Don't answer me, for you'd only be lying!"

No thought of lying had passed through my head, but that word 'accomplice' that had been latent so long in my brain, it was she who dared to proffer it straight out unhesitatingly, but through saying it, was she not making a confession? I thought she was. I felt that a violent reaction was sweeping away my late tender folly, and that that terrible word had recreated me into a worried accuser, yet since at all cost I desired to learn more from her, I managed to restrain myself.

"As you've only got a faint heart, you didn't want to admit it," she went on, "or rather, you didn't even want to think about it. You redoubled your care and solicitude for your friend, considering that in that way you would be absolved as far as he was concerned."

"I swear I had no suspicions," I could not prevent myself exclaiming.

"If you interrupt me, it's finished, and I'll be silent. You can have your turn to speak presently, and if you haven't understood me aright, you'll then be able to ask me to explain myself to you more clearly. For the moment, listen to me, for I'm quite confident that I'm speaking the truth. You put your conscience to sleep with the drug of devotion or grief—call it what you will. Your excuse is your nature, your nationality and your upbringing, and besides, you were in love with me and Love is stronger than anything."

Here she sighed deeply.

"But," she continued, "I didn't understand, since I didn't know what could have upset you, and yet I could see that you were struggling; but what against? I merely imagined that it was one of those intimate fights that you Catholics are used to—a spasm of conscience, the struggle betwixt love and friendship, between the desire to possess me and the wish to prolong Robert's life. I think it was more serious even than that. It had been suggested to you, or you had been given to understand, that Robert's life was threatened and that she who was looking after him desired to shorten it. Are you still prepared to swear that that's not true? I admit you did not consider yourself in the light of an accomplice in those days,

but are you so sure to-day that you were not one ? ”

My doubts and anxieties on this very point were too recent and too sore for me to venture to protest, but what confounded me more than anything was the calm tone of my accuser. “ Even to-day,” thought I to myself, “ I’m not sure of the passive complicity she imputes to me, whilst she is confessing to it and seems to dominate me in spite of it all ! ”

All this made so strange a muddle that I was not sure I rightly understood her. She only paused for an instant, as though to collect her ideas.

“ That’s how things were,” she resumed, “ and events were accomplished. We came to the time when we belonged to each other. You forgot your anguish and your vague remorse, for our happiness was too great for us to be able to cope with it, and swept all before it. I too, like you, allowed myself to be carried away on the wave and forgot everything. My anxiety on your account was still vaguer than your remorse. I’ve not felt it since then, and have thought it was but a dream, and I really believe that if I had known the truth during our wonderful journey of Love, I shouldn’t have worried over it overmuch. We had risen to the exalted position of demi-gods—you and I—and possessed in ourselves every kind of right. In uniting us, Nature was realizing

something so rare that nothing could have stood in the way of my loving you."

"Sophie!" I murmured dully, making an effort to recapture her fingers, but she eluded me.

"Oh, no!" she returned, for an instant covering her face with her hands, whilst I waited, wondering what she was going to say next and where all this discourse was leading us to.

"Then there was that meeting at Marseilles—a strange coincidence because, even before we landed, I was afraid of setting foot in France. When we were on the boat watching the coast coming closer to us and everything was so lovely, I nearly begged you not to land but to take me on another journey that should last for all time. If we had done so, we should still be the same extraordinary couple—two priests of Eros. And then came that step of Fate. I understood then, understood all very thoroughly, as I was coming towards that man and you. I had halted for an instant, realizing that each of you was burning to hear the other's words, and when I did approach you, his eyes looked at me over your shoulder in a sort of stupid fright. His emotion on recognizing me, his pitiful haste to get away, and your embarrassment—the chain linked up immediately and automatically in my mind. There was a mutual thought between that man and you, that you hid

from me because you realized that it was hostile to me, and since the man was a doctor——”

She did not bother to finish her sentence. The strain of listening to her was making the blood roar in my ears, and there was no need now for her to request me not to interrupt.

“I ought to have spoken to you frankly that evening—yes, when we were alone again together in our bedroom—but you know it’s neither imagination nor whim on my part, but I simply can’t tear his intimate thoughts even out of the man I love ; and in my case, I should have to be killed rather than that my thought should be wrenched from me before I was ready to utter it. In my native land, during the Revolution, I once risked death rather than reply. It’s not that I’m proud of being like that ; I just can’t help it, that’s all. So we went to bed without my having spoken to you, and I put the matter off to the morrow.”

“What would you have said to me ? ” I could not help asking her.

“I should merely have said, ‘I saw the scene between you and that doctor, and think I know the cause of your anxiety. If we don’t tell each other all the truth, we shall suffer for it either now or later.’ I trusted that I should find an opportunity to speak to you that way on the next day, or soon afterwards anyway——”

“But why on earth didn’t you then ? ”

She proffered me no reply, but for one

instant her face revealed to me that pathetic disorder that voluptuousness imparted to it, for through voluptuousness alone did this sphinx become like other women ; like those precious stones that can withstand ordinary fire and need several thousand degrees of heat to soften them. As a consequence, it was voluptuousness that lent her modesty—a modesty so touching that my irritation against her began to melt away as I saw it appearing on her face. Once again, I spoke her name in broken tones.

“ Sophie ! ”

“ On the morrow,” she went on in a duller and more constrained tone, “ on the morrow you were guilty of a rather mean trick, but I’m not afraid to confess that I was your accomplice, immediately and thoroughly. Yes. It’s incredible that one should become a slave to one’s body to such an extent. I was more yours, during that unsettled period, than I’ve ever been ; I loved you more and I was happier. All the past became indifferent to me and I refused to look into the future. I lived in the fleeting hour that intoxicated like wine as it sped. Don’t come any nearer, I beg of you and don’t touch me. I love that guilty time ; don’t make me hate it ! ”

But nothing could rein back the passion those last words of hers had aroused in me and I was impelled by a frenzy stronger than the one I had had at the Marseilles dawn or during



the feverish period in our lives she had just recalled. She resisted me with every effort of her braced muscles, and for an instant I felt her nails sink into my throat and her teeth into my hand, but those wounds fired instead of calming me. The shoulder strap of her dress half wrenched off, the pearls of her necklace scattered on the carpet, her disordered hair all over her forehead, she lost her footing and fell back on to the sofa, her defences all fallen to my attack, and I was on the point of gratifying my lust on her, drunk and evil as the brutes she had once succeeded in escaping from, when her still-loving woman's instinct caused her to speak the only words capable of holding me off :

“ Take care, or you'll be making me hate love, as I did before you came into my life ! ”

I let go of her, beaten and ashamed, whilst she got up and straightened her hair and dress. Her eyes never left me, as though she feared some fresh assault, but that was needless, since her exclamation had frozen my blood whilst clearing my brain. What wonderful sincerity, permeated by anguish at the loss of her own desire, there had been in that cry of hers ! Limply I fell back on the divan that was all disarranged from our tussle, whilst she, now reassured, drew her armchair a little away from me and re-seated herself without any semblance of haste. For a little time we were unable to speak, and my shaken thoughts wandered in a

narrow circle. "Since she is afraid of ceasing to love me, it must be that she still loves me?" So long as the bond of love remained unbroken between us, that appeared once more the only thing of real importance to me, and all the rest a battle of shadows in the night. This sentiment I expressed when I muttered:

"What is all this leading us to? Where are we going?"

"To the truth," she quickly retorted. "You know that, unlike your former companions among women, I cannot adapt myself to approximates and understoods. I gave you all of me, my body and my conscience. How could I live with you, with a whole world of thoughts that concern me, racking you and constantly coming between us—thoughts that you will not impart to me?"

"It's not, you must understand, that I want to know all your thoughts," she continued, coming closer to me and taking my hands. "I'm neither so unjust nor so absurd, for I realize that in every human being, in you and everyone else, there are things that cannot be communicated."

"And yourself," I broke in.

"Yes, in myself more than anyone, more than I like, for there are times when I feel myself secret and enclosed, but never, I can assure you, over a matter like the one torturing you at this moment, a matter on which depends—

how shall I put it?—honesty and the truth of mutual sentiments. Remember how I came to you while Robert was still alive. Do you think that cost me nothing? But it was necessary, whereas you, you've been deceiving me, and you're still deceiving me."

She leaned over me and stroked my shoulder with her hand as though to soften the bitterness of her words.

"Not in the puerile sense that causes so much jealousy in your countrywomen. You've been working against me in the dark, behind my back. Please don't deny it or protest. Your visit the day before yesterday to the surgeon—I know all about that—quite simply, without having you watched or followed. You left the directory open at the page where his name was, and it leapt to my eyes, the only name that counts where Robert's malady is concerned. Your absence again this morning——"

A beneficent peace had been flowing through me since her hand had started stroking my shoulder, and I laid my heated cheek against that cool hand.

"This morning," I returned, "I did nothing against you. If you must know I felt a need to go and visit Robert's grave."

She seemed surprised at that.

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "That I should never have guessed." And then, after a pause for reflection, "What remains of a body after

life has deserted it, seems so insignificant to me. I supposed you had been to confess to a priest!"

Her quiet voice reassured me, and I should have liked her to go on talking and calming me with the sound of her words and the touch of her fingers, but what seems inexplicable to me to day, when I reflect on it, is that that calm, that vague sense of well-being filled me with the memory of my recent emotion when the thought had rushed through my head, "She confesses . . . she confesses." Yes, all this fitted in and I was accepting the inevitable. I switched my mind to Robert's mysterious advice, the rede from beyond the grave, "Like intellect, conscience lights up but a narrow area of ourselves, beyond which starts the shadow, and further still opaque darkness. Don't try to penetrate that darkness!"

"Don't resent my going off to meditate at Robert's tomb," I said, with my burning cheek still in contact with her cool hand. "Didn't you notice that I came back in a calmer frame of mind?"

"Yes, that's what made me think it was a priest."

"And the first result of that soul-searching has been that I had given up my nightmares, just at the moment that you yourself broke the silence."

She sat up suddenly, seizing me by the shoulders and compelling me to look her in the eyes

"Is that true?" she demanded.

"Yes, it is."

The light in her eyes became more intense.

"For always?"

Flinging myself at her feet, and clasping her knees, I laid my forehead on the cloth of her dress that was all impregnated with the scent of her, and stammered out:

"Yes, yes, for always. Let's erase and destroy from our memories all that is not just us two. Provided I keep you and don't get chilled with that deathly cold of a while ago! I love you, I love you! What you did, you did for me, because you loved me . . . I did it with you. . . . I want to have done it with you. You've said the word. I'm your accomplice . . . you understand, your accomplice."

Violently she shook herself free from me and exclaimed:

"Ah! wretch that you are!"

Painfully I rose in my turn, like an animal beneath the stroke of the whip, as she faced me once more:

"That's all you can find to offer me, is it? A dual life, criminal and accomplice, and wipe the slate clean. But," she seized my arms and shook them, "do you really think I did that? Say, do you still think so?"

It was then as though daylight came to me in a flash and I gave an exclamation:

"No . . . no. You didn't do it," I said,

and as she released my arm, I fell back on the sofa, speechless, with barely the power to breathe.

She, too, was breathing with some effort and had to sit down, and thus we remained for some time, quite unable to say a word. Then she started again, in a calmer voice but one rendered rather monotonous with pain.

"You could believe that of me?"

"I don't believe it now. I've faith in you!"

"I don't want your declaration of faith. You deserve to be deceived. Listen to me!"

"Sophie, I beg of you——"

"Listen! Learn now, first of all, that over in Norway, a short time after my dreadful bridal night, I confronted Robert—who suspected nothing of what was really the matter with him—with my master, whose experience and science are at least as great as those of the other surgeon, the one you consulted."

I once more implored her silence by a gesture.

"No. You shall hear me now right to the end. He made an examination of Robert pretending that it was tonsillitis, but the case was manifest and glaring to the eye. The cells had worked their way from the original seat of the evil to the circulation, but by a miracle the patient was not suffering, for there was a check

in the evolution of the malady, possibly owing to the climatic effect. To operate would be to risk more rapid diffusion and immediate suffering, without saving his life, but probably shortening it."

"Never have I accused you——"

"Of having purposely let slip every possible chance of cure, or, in other words, of having finished Robert off, for there are no two ways about it? Thank you, indeed! Instead of that, you preferred to believe—examine your heart—that in my haste to belong to you, I forced the injections, and thus shortened the patient's life. You believe that, you believe that! You say to yourself, 'She's of a realistic turn of mind and has persuaded herself she has the right . . .' Well no, Antoine, I can't play ducks and drakes with my conscience, and it was my conscience that said to me, 'What Robert in full possession of his faculties—in full possession of his faculties, you understand, and duly warned—asks and commands me, I have no right to refuse him . . .'"

"It was he who wished it?" I asked.

"But, of course . . ."

"He knew, then?"

"Why, yes, he knew."

I found that I was unable to utter a single word to express my confusion, as Sophie continued:

"When I got back to the Rue Hautefeuille,

on the day of my visit to your flat, Robert greeted me by saying, 'I've got a confession to make to you. I've been to see a doctor while you've been out'—naming the doctor, who of course was the same as the one you consulted the day before yesterday—'If I've not told you before, it was to save you discussion and suffering. Now I *know*. I want you to understand that I accept the inevitable with resignation in my heart, but I don't want to parade before you the spectacle of ugly and futile agony. Shorten things for me, please. Wouldn't you do as I'm doing?' I told him I would certainly do so, therefore the pact was concluded and I observed my part. In view of the state of his heart, there was a certain risk of seizure, and I warned him of it. Although it was to the latter that he succumbed, I'm sure I could not desire to be treated any differently from the way I treated him."

"If you'd only told me . . ." I began.

"Please don't try and find excuses. I really ought not to tell you anything now, for the essence of professional secrecy is to refrain from unveiling another person's conscience. To-day you've forced me to it, but I hesitated a long time before telling you, I can assure you. It seems to me I've got the right . . . the right not to sacrifice the living to the dead, but I'm not certain, and that hurts me."

It is said that there is romance in every



human life, and I think that the adventure of my life is of that type. I've read enough novels to guess pretty accurately how a novelist, on reaching this point in the critical scene, would have carried it on to move and hold the reader's attention—supplications, refusals, threats, perhaps a struggle or a death, perhaps two . . .

Here I can only write my humble record of reality, and that reality was incredible in its simplicity, I might almost say, from earth to earth.

Sophie had spoken her last words in a voice gradually growing slower and lower, almost without any accentuation. She appeared exhausted, dying of fatigue, unable to talk any more. As for me, I had remained on the sofa, frozen into an immobility that resembled paralysis, but with the same apparent calm, though my heart was in tatters. All contrition or defence I might have attempted died in me as soon as conceived, like wretched illusions. A long unbroken silence fell on the purple drawing-room where the vernal freshness of the May night began to penetrate us as the heat of the fire lessened.

"It's late," said Sophie, getting up. "Come along, we must pick up these pearls<sup>22</sup> before going to bed."

Picking them up, counting them and putting them into a box, switching out the lights and

going to our room, gave us a brief truce. The camp bed was made up for me as usual beside our larger conjugal bed, and the only sign of a new order of things, tacitly agreed to by both of us, was that I left Sophie alone in her room and withdrew into mine.





#### XIV

THE War imprinted in my memory a weird collection of pictures—sad or tragical, striking or sinister, sometimes amusing—as it did to all those who actually fought in the front line, but there is one picture that cannot be adapted to any of these epithets, and whose outlines and colour still cling to me with singular clearness.

It was on September 17th, 1914, and the Battle of the Marne was drawing to its close. The Third German Army, retiring before the Fifth French Army, was beginning, as it was termed, to stick to the ground and hold its own, as the pursuit was easing down. Exhausted conquerors, we were advancing like slow ghosts across a dismal plain, for we had not had a night's rest in thrice twenty-four hours. When my section halted that evening on the outskirts of Varennes-en-Argonne, many of them at once

lay down by the roadside or in the fields where they happened to be and fell asleep like worn-out tramps. I had still strength enough left to push on to a barn we could see ahead of us in the semi-darkness, a few hundred yards away from the road. We found it wide open and there were some other men already asleep in a heap at the other end. I went over to have a look at them but not one of them made a move.

"You know," said I to the corporal who was with us, "they're Huns."

"I can't help that," he replied, "I want to go to sleep."

Five minutes later, everyone in that barn was fast asleep in two groups—pursued and pursuers, conquerors and vanquished, reduced by common fatigue from a state of hostility to that of mere beasts who prefer to sleep rather than watch.

When I rubbed my eyes on awakening about five o'clock in the morning, dawn was already paling the gaping door of the barn, but the Huns had vanished.

I cannot help recalling that strange night and those hours of truce imposed by fatigue when I begin to recollect all that followed the explanation in the purple drawing-room, for Sophie and myself.

As I have done throughout this narrative, I pass or touch on the incidents that do not

directly concern the adventure of our two hearts, and the evolution of our double life. On the day following the explanation, I was threatened with brain fever, and a definite physical danger was thus substituted for the nebulous one that might be incurred if discussion were immediately resumed on the same topic. Once again Sophie became a nurse at her husband's bedside, for I was pretty nearly in the condition of the man who receives a blow on the head—so long as the clot of blood on the brain is not absorbed, he cannot be master of that brain, but has delirium and mental aberration. I can clearly remember the form my delusion assumed. I started to get my personality mixed up with Robert's. I was in that room at Montpellier, and was the invalid cared for and watched over by that serious, attentive and beautiful woman, Robert's mistress—my mistress—but the disappearance of the third party became unbearable to me, and Sophie has since told me that I would keep on repeating in my obstinacy, "Where is he? Where's Antoine?" The other worry that obsessed me was more vague but just as painful. I was really suffering because my thought ran, "Sophie does not love me any more. She has no desire for me except the one I impose on her." Yet in the chaotic condition of my poor head, it was Robert who thus complained and suffered from an estrangement provoked by the ugliness of his malady.

Ah, miserable reason that is ours ! Plunged into imbecility just because a small blood-vessel in one of the brain-cells gets obstructed !

The cause of my illness was happily but a passing trouble without organic lesion, so that my head was cured at the end of three days, my ideas recovered their normal state and Sophie was released from her perpetual duty in the sickroom. There then commenced for the pair of us—by the force of things and especially by our common dejection—a period of truce that was far removed from happiness, but equally so from pain. Like those enemies sleeping almost side by side in the barn at Varennes, we realized that the fight was not over ; a single engagement, even one violent enough to leave us so exhausted, does not end such a conflict, but to start a fight one requires forces and strength, and the energy of both of us was paralysed for some time to come, Sophie's as well as mine.

The truce was established between us,—tacitly and without any expression of agreement—a truce each of us sorely needed, both for the purposes of observing his opponent and to gather together his own resources, so to speak, a sort of borderline where we were glad to be, since we had feared worse things. What would I not give to-day to get back there and know once more its calming peace ; to rest from anguish, suspicion and remorse ; to rest

from amorous exaltation and the heat of desire ; to rest even from violent joys and the relapse ensuing from satiation ; to have one's flesh numbed like the bodies of those monks and nuns that roam through the tranquil cloisters and are only the visible envelope of a soul. That pleasant time that flowed gently on, that was exempt neither from monotony nor occasionally from vague boredom, but whose healing virtue came to me doubtless owing to the fact that Sophie herself at that same period seemed to me to be like a soul half absorbed in a cold body. That at least was what my imagination pictured, maybe from idleness or fear of reflecting too closely on things. I was afraid to think, for I had suffered too much pain, and was conscious that it arose from overthinking. In any case, of what use further reflection ? The problem that had been torturing me was solved, and solved in the most desirable way, since it exculpated Sophie. " That's all done with now," I would tell myself as soon as I felt the slightest temptation to recall the object of my recent mental suffering. I imposed silence on myself and just allowed myself to drift, like a patient who has regained his health by an operation, but who refuses to believe that the disease is perhaps not entirely rooted out of his system, and that it may be necessary to operate on him again.

I have remarked that Sophie appeared to be

equally appeased, perhaps more deeply so than I. When I had got over my short attack of fever, she naturally and maybe unconsciously retained the attitude of watchful vigilance over my health and my moral welfare, and there was something almost maternal about her. She seemed to have taken upon herself the task of ensuring my cure and my outlook on things, of making life peaceful and calm for me—the reverse of that ardent and stormy period that had bruised and scorched the hearts of us both. She it was who gently but firmly insisted that I should follow up my interview at the Quai d'Orsay.

“Go back and see your old chief, and take up your life again as an active and busy man. You'll soon see how well you'll feel from it.”

I obeyed her and soon found myself back in the office next door to my chief's. The regularity of coming and going between my home and the Foreign Office marked its monotonous course through my days. In the perusal of dossiers, relations, conferences and measures, the hours of my life trickled along almost imperceptibly, and I gradually regained my liking for a task that on my return from the Montparnasse Cemetery had appeared to me a half-dead and vain existence. My languid and weakened mind brought to it fresh importance and interest, and my conversations with Sophie were nourished by it. On her part, Sophie



successfully managed for herself the cure of laborious distraction that she had prescribed for me and I found it by no means surprising that she should set herself to complete and publish the second volume of Robert's work, for all the materials were ready to her hand and set in order by our common task. We had at first thought of offering them to the public just as they were, as *Pascal's Thoughts on Religion and Some Other Subjects* had been done by Port-Royal in 1669, but Sophie altered that decision, and took it upon herself to link up the discontinued parts of the work with brief analyses, considering, as she put it to me, that she was well enough acquainted with the author's thoughts not to misunderstand or distort them, and moreover these addenda would be quite distinct from the original text. She did not ask me to help her, for "You've got quite enough to get on with yourself," she told me. "It's better I should offer you the finished work so that you may then judge of it in its entirety." Thus our relationship became transformed into a union of two workers who toiled apart during the day, and often continued their work in the evening, each at his own desk, but close together. There was no worldly outside life for us, for Parisian amusements did not greatly tempt us, but as the season was gradually advancing to summer, we were glad to get to the Bois after dinner, where we strolled through

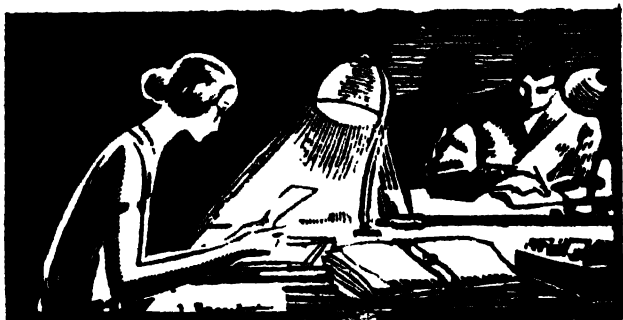
the silent alleys, discussing our work. Meeting silent couples who had come there to hide their languor or their emotions, did not cause either of our hearts to miss a beat, and once we were back in our home, we separated on the common threshold of our two rooms with a brotherly kiss. To contemplate rebuilding our future together on such a plan would have evidently been an absurd undertaking—but there was no definite plan nor any undertaking. A hazardous state of affairs was in vogue and lasted on account of the temporary absence of any force powerful enough to disturb it. What truces are thus arranged between husband and wife, I am certain, not after conflicts as extraordinary as ours, perhaps, but following the vulgar scene of some newly discovered adultery, with its reproaches, disputes and final glossing-over? The two sides, worn out with fatigue, lie under the same roof, but with this difference, that they are not as close to each other as they were before. An empty space between them marks the frontier, just as it did between the two groups of tired enemies in the barn at Varennes, and when someone tries to shake them out of their inertia with the exclamation, "You know, the enemy's here," they merely reply, just as my corporal did then :

"Let me sleep !"

The sleepers of Varennes-en-Argonne were well aware that their sleep would not bring the

War to a close, and we too knew, without letting our thoughts rest on it, that the explanation in the purple drawing-room had not concluded anything at all. Sophie Raynal would never forget the suspicion with which I had wounded her, for in reality, one forgets nothing and, in the true sense of the word, forgives nothing. As regarded myself, was I fully satisfied, although my mind was eased of that suspicion? Of course I was not. Though justified before the tribunal of her own conscience, Sophie was not so to the same degree before mine. A respect for human life dwelled in me, transmitted to me by long heredity and consolidated by the religious education I had received during my early years. I was sure that, in Sophie's place, I should not have yielded to Robert's plea.


Thus, not only did our consciences not agree but they were in opposite camps, for the welfare of the one was the hurt of the other, and then again, nothing calm, neutral or passive could be lasting between husband and wife wedded, not through convenience, interest or habit, but by love. Love was to take its revenge on their reason and their very consciences, and I should never have dreamed of the shape that revenge was to take.



## XV

I SHOULD imagine that it must be a fairly rare thing for a man who has been occupied over women more than anything else for many years of his youth, never to have suffered the pangs of jealousy, yet such was my case. I derive neither pride nor shame from the fact, but I am compelled to put it into writing since I am confessing herein all that relates to myself, for like every other man who has trafficked in women, I was often duped and occasionally deceived. There may have resulted for me a certain degree of shock to my vanity, a feeling of spite and a desire for revenge—soon dispersed by indifference and forgetfulness—but never pain beforehand nor ache after certainty.

I here foresee a possible objection that may be raised—how many women have made it to me personally!—"You were not really in

love!" True, the feeling I experienced for those deceiving jades did not come up to my boyhood's dreams, nor did it equal the great upheaval of soul that I was to go through after meeting Sophie, yet all around me, during my period of dissipation, I used to notice men, either like me or companions of my own, whose love affairs were very similar, consumed with jealousy for partners, who were certainly not worthy causes of such suffering. The fact was that my sensitiveness did not react as theirs did, although I felt conscious of a great capability for love, greater than theirs, and subject to deeper upheavals. Doubtless a predisposition of Nature, fostered and disciplined by Robert's influence and the ardent meditations of our boyhood, caused me to rate the amorous passages of my youth and the women associated with them, at their proper value. In love affairs I was more in my element than at play, and the deceptions and insults I received affected me no more than the losing of money at poker. I might feel rather spiteful for the moment, like the man who throws down his cards, declaring that he will never touch them again, but knowing fully well that he will be playing again the next day. 

Later on, after meeting Sophie, I learned that I could suffer through the presence of a woman who did not belong to me, but I suffered because I could not have her to myself, and not because

she belonged to someone else. All through our journey by stages from Montpellier to Nice, when I used to quit Robert and his companion on the threshold of their marital chamber, I was consumed with regrets and sometimes desire, but—if I rightly understand the true meaning of the word jealousy—I was never jealous. It is, moreover, an ambiguous word, that Spinoza's famous corollary has left undefined, for it is said indifferently of a man that he is jealous of another man or of the woman who belongs to that man; but is there any similarity between those two sentiments? I understand jealousy to mean that mad desire for love's happiness that another is receiving, and under such circumstances, I insist that I felt no envy of Robert at their bedroom door. I say I did not envy Robert, being convinced that Sophie belonged to him through her own act of pity and admiration, a thing that would not have appealed to me in any way or brought me the slightest happiness. He who will, may consider me less sensitive than those lovers who talk and cry their woes from the housetops, but to me my sensitiveness seems deeper and truer. I am not jealous in the conventional sense of the word, and in the physical way I could only feel jealous of desire.

It was reserved for me to learn later that such jealousy need not necessarily be of the physical order.

I have related how, on the day following our explanation, my wife had allocated to herself the task of editing our friend's posthumous work. I had taken no umbrage at this, for her desire to occupy hours that might be otherwise empty and perilous after such a shaking-up, and to calm her nerves by work, justified her effort as it did mine, and I found it quite natural that I should not collaborate with her in the completion of the volume, although I had participated in the collection and classification of the MSS. for my new work allowed me insufficient leisure for the purpose.

Yet I could not disinterest myself in her or it, for Sophie remained the pivot of my life, despite the temporary neutralization of part of our common territory. On those evenings when we were both working, each at a separate task and desk, I could not very long abstain from lifting my eyes from my own task, and letting them rest on her studious profile bent over the sheets of the work she had undertaken. How that work seemed to absorb her! I felt I could perceive—between her attentive eyes and the notes she was reading over—a magnetic current that nothing could divert, for I might move, get up, even leave the room and return, without her appearing to notice it. At other times, instead of reading, she would be writing and I well knew what she was writing—lines intended to fill the gaps left by Robert

in his MSS., 'bridging' as she called it. At such moments I had an impression that I could trace the thought that flowed from her brain to the paper, a thought that she endeavoured to make as similar as possible, at the same point in the work, to the thought of our big friend.

In the beginning, such application and intense effort were pleasing to me and reassured me. "Her nerves must be calmed and her heart appeased," thought I, "if she can thus plunge into such mental labour. Her faithfulness to the dead is a sequel to her devotion to the living. Her conscience is indeed of that pure and sound metal that Robert gloried in, and if that metal of her conscience rings differently from mine, have I the right to say that mine rings true, whilst hers rings false?"

Thus for some time I experienced a pacifying well-being by tacitly associating myself with her work, though she did not concern herself with mine. Moved by the constancy and seriousness of her effort, I would sometimes quit my desk to approach her and lay my lips on the parting of her hair, just as a father might do to a studious daughter.

By what influence was that sympathy gradually changed into watchful and malevolent curiosity, then aggravation, and finally pain? It was, I believe, simply because I was bit by bit becoming again the man I had been before my recent shocks and agonies, as these faded into



the past. My nature and temperament were recovering in the course of a truce that I had feared at first would be precarious but which now seemed durable enough. I had dreaded a break, but our double life went on, provisionally excluding love, but admitting a sort of gentle friendship. I had as yet made no effort to recapture the ground I had lost, but, without so admitting to myself, I began to consider it a possibility and to hope for it, until an unexpected obstacle intruded itself between Sophie and myself, or rather, I should say, Sophie seemed to be slipping more and more out of my life and isolating herself from me, burying herself in a world of ideas to which I had no access, wedding her intimate thoughts to those of someone that was not me. Perfectly to conceive the effect of such evasion and such absorption by another on my sensibility, it must be remembered that until the terrible scene in the purple drawing-room, this woman had been mine to an inexpressible degree, a willing and desirous slave, joyfully surrendering to me not only her person but her mind, sacrificing herself body and soul with a kind of passionate humility. To-day, I feel that I could for the moment have suffered that her body be withdrawn from me because I knew that she belonged to no one else, but the withdrawal of her mind hurt me like betrayal because it was being taken from me by another.

I then came to learn, care by care and wound by wound, what was the meaning of that word jealousy that had always seemed to me a romantic invention in books, and a sort of lunacy in the lives of others. The field of my thought was restricted, so that the only things that appeared to matter were to find out what degree of influence my dead friend had regained over my wife, and what was her feeling about it. I became nervous and taciturn through being unable to focus my thoughts on to anything else, and being unable to confess those thoughts. Henceforth a whole part of my intimate life was hidden from Sophie, and I was torn betwixt the desire to question her and shame at laying bare my secret.

My actions were those of a jealous man, that he is obliged to conceal because they are to his knowing inadmissible. One day, for example, I profited by Sophie's absence to extract the MSS. from the drawer where she kept it, turn over the pages and read the lines she had written, behaving all the while as prudently as any burglar, in order that my moral outbreak should leave no traces. My heart was racing, my hands trembling, and an ordinary jealous man, going through his mistress's papers to find a written proof of deception, could not have been more on pins and needles than I.

Alas ! what I discovered revealed my adversity far more cruelly than the most ardent

billet-doux in the eyes of a jealous lover. I had had too great experience of my friend Robert's style and thoughts not to be smitten with amazement on reading the lines written by Sophie to bridge the gaps in the original manuscript. It was neither a personal commentary nor a skilful imitation ; it was Robert's very inspiration, method and expression to the life. The handwriting alone betrayed the difference, and it was easy to see that even that was beginning to alter and model itself on the other—a quite natural phenomenon, I am assured, when anyone works long and arduously on MSS. written by the same hand. The effect of this perusal on me was stunning. Oppressed at first with anguish to the point of suffocation, with my heart pounding and the cold sweat of dizziness dewing my temples, I only regained my breath and my normal temperature to plunge into a kind of weak despair like a deserted or lost child, and fell to sobbing for the second time since my childhood. This was somewhere about half-past three on a June afternoon when in blinding light and grilling heat, Paris resembled a dusty furnace. To make matters worse, I had closed both the windows in the room so as to hear better what was going on in the house, for, as may well be imagined, the last thing I desired was for Sophie to come in unexpectedly and surprise me at my dastardly task. The close atmosphere became over-

whelming, so gathering up the rags of my will-power I got up, thrust the papers back into their place and slunk out of the house like a common assassin.

How ingenious, skilful, active and persevering is that jealous passion I ignored, and how well it can ferret out all the signs from the past as well as the present, to piece them together ! How lucidly it argues and proves to the sufferer that there is something to suffer over and that he must go through it ! I began to reconstruct the tale of Sophie's feelings for Robert with the sureness and accuracy of a geometrical problem. In the beginning admiration, intellectual desire, the need to bestow happiness ; then her physical enlightenment, and as soon as I appeared in her life, revolt against conjugal slavery. Enfranchisement, the free joy of belonging to the man one loves, the revelation of real love with heart and senses subjugated, the willing and happy sacrifice of the spirit. To be sure, the likeness of the dead must remain dear and respected but it fades away into the past, for the living has taken the place of the dead and thrust the latter from between the survivors, relegating him to the abstract domain fitted for the dead. That is right and proper and should be so, and will remain so long as the winner occupies the whole of the woman's senses.

If she is happy through love, what woman doubts her happiness ? The man who gives

it her is first among men and there can be no question of comparing him to others, for he is king . . . but his kingship is a very precarious one ! When a woman has given the whole of herself for a time, all of her gift must be in peril if she starts to withdraw but a little of herself, especially if her self-release begins with her mind and if she herself is ingenious and quick-witted, as in that case she may venture to judge her partner and his cause is at once lost. Love's vision over-estimated and super-humanized him in the first instance and now the web of enchantment melts away.

My clear-seeing jealousy set dates to those subtle events in the history of our lives. Sophie's disenchantment had commenced on the day that her slight illness had broken off our business in love, and it was then that she had begun to study and criticize me. I had thenceforth no longer appeared to her as intangible, but I might still be secret and dissembling as any ordinary man.

The explanation in the purple drawing-room had been my final overthrow from the pedestal she had set me on at the beginning. Sophie had been cut to the quick by a suspicion of such insulting nature that she had not even conceived its possibilities, but above all—and this I had only taken into account since my jealousy had been borne in me—she had come to despise me for having been so imprudent as to blurt out

that I thought her guilty but wanted her just the same !

Immediately the last tatters of the mist of enchantment floated away and it was as a clear-headed and free woman that Sophie had gone alone to her room that night—that room that had previously belonged to the two of us. Alone, do I say ? Not so, for my jealousy told me that a ghost awaited her there. Where else could she find refuge—this woman standing amidst the ruins of her castle of love that had come tumbling about her ears—save in the ever pure memory of her first mate ? She was far too realistic to carry on any mysterious traffic with a ghost, but what was to prevent her from thinking, “ Robert would not have done that ” ? “ From the moment she starts to compare us,” thought I, “ I am doomed for Robert would never have acted as I’ve done. He knew and understood Sophie better than I, and mad over her as I may be, he possessed more of her than I ever did.”

In my late apprenticeship to jealousy, one of its effects struck me especially—the way it sweeps everything else before it and withdraws all other worries, daily cares and the very landscape of life to the horizon of the torrid desert where it makes its lair. It is almost as though the faculties of observation and reflection are all absorbed by it, and that the rest does not count, nor is seen or felt. An incident that, had

it occurred three months earlier, would have frightened or pleased me—I really do not know which—but that would certainly have disturbed me to some degree, hardly caused a ripple on the surface of my feelings. It concerned Sophie's far-distant past, before even she had made Robert's acquaintance, so it will be realized that it could have no vastly disturbing influence over me at the present time. It was without the slightest tinge of curiosity that I could stand by and hear her speak in a tongue that was a mystery to me, to a stranger who had lived near her for years when she had been a girl. It was only with somewhat impatient indifference that I watched that working man, whose face had a distinctly Finnish shape, bend over and almost kneel to my wife's fair hands and place his lips to them. Ah, that he might have kept them prisoners rather than release them to that malevolent task to which the dead called them. The man was the same who had accompanied and protected Sophie in her flight from her storm-swept country. He had never ceased corresponding with her, not by the ordinary methods—since being an ordinary night-watchman, he could neither read nor write—but through the medium of the Norwegian employers for whom he had been working. The latter, whose confidence he had won, had charged him with a mission, at least so he said, the delivery of some precious object left

in security over there by some refugees at present in Paris. The man, Sophie told me, was one of those creatures who only surrender their trust with their life, but possibly all that he said was not true, or maybe some political influence controlled the faithful animal. Sophie was not averse to believing this, and like me, paid no great heed to it. More interesting, however, was the piece of news he brought my wife, news that was uncertain and lacking proof, but persistent and confirming certain rumours, that had recently been brought by fugitives—that one of Sophie's brothers, her junior by a couple of years, had escaped the Pogrom and gone over to the enemy's camp, and now, under an assumed name that the emissary imparted to her, was an official under the new regime.

Even during the time we were in complete accord with one another, Sophie's past and the early years she had spent in her own country, were a subject she was loath to discuss, and understanding her repugnance, as Robert had done, I never attempted to question her on it. Of her own free will, however, she had told me all that it is natural that a husband should know of his wife's family and origin, and that with her usual serious sincerity. Besides, chance bits of information that came to me through my official position confirmed the accuracy of her statements on several occasions, and I



recollected having heard her mention Paul, this brother of hers.

Jealousy is very ingenious in that it only retains of events just what can be useful to it and arouse it. Mine—I have said it—lost interest in the incident itself but not on the effect it might have on Sophie to distract and disturb her. I repeated over to myself Heine's words, "The dead are dead and there are only the living that live," and a puerile hope glowed in me that this survivor might assist me in vanquishing the dead. Without a great deal of tact, for the passion that had me in his grip is shy and clumsy, I set myself to talking to Sophie all day long of her brother Paul, getting her to describe him to me and making her recall memories of their childhood together. She lent herself readily to this and even with some pleasure, it seemed to me, but without visible trace of emotion, though it is true that her intimate emotions were rarely to be seen.

In the evening when we settled down to work, there was one particular moment that caused me a pang and that was when—the documents all out of that detested cupboard, the clean or half-written-on sheets of paper in orderly array in front of her—she left me, in spirit at any rate, to seek the first master of her body. It was at that moment that I watched her with an almost infallible acuteness of vision, and all my faculties of perception were concen-

trated in my eyes. On that particular evening there was mingled an absurd hope with my anguish. Would she be able, after learning so strange and touching a piece of news a few hours before, and after our conversation of that day that I asked nothing better than to carry on, since it seemed to have brought her back a little closer to me, would she be able once more to devote the whole of her thoughts to converse with a shadow? Would she for that shadow, desert this other living being as she was deserting me? The illusion did not have a minute's life, and I was soon persuaded that, even had her brother been present, he would have had no greater power to break the spell than I. Alternately bent over Robert's manuscript or over the paper where she was inditing the commentary, her spirit was soon as far away as it had been on the evening before and on every other evening. She was moving freely, with joy and fervour in a domain from which I was excluded, so far from me that she did not even hear my breathing nor perceive the nervous gestures of my limbs.

It was thus in other but still recent times that I had myself controlled and possessed her. I recognized that absorption of hers, for I had realized it myself, but now I *saw* her thoughts conquered and occupied by that other's thoughts, and it seemed to me as though I were present at the very act of my betrayal. Every

moment I was asking myself whether, the next instant I should not be hurling myself at *them*, wrenching her adulterous trash away from the woman, tearing it up and treading on it, and, standing on the very heap of the debris, take a husband's revenge by force.

The temptation finally became unbearable, and I had no option but to give way to it. I drew near the table where Sophie was working, but she made no effort to look up and her pen went on swishing gently over the paper. My right hand touched that paper so roughly that it was crumpled.

"Excuse me," I said in as firm a tone as I could summon up, "I'm tired and feeling rather heavy about the head. I think I'll take some narcotic and go to bed."

Laying down her pen at last, she looked up at me and raised the shade of her reading-lamp to see me better. At the same time she took hold of my wrist at the spot where the artery's throbbing can be felt.

"Your pulse is rapid," she remarked, "but not feverish. Would you like me to come with you?"

That offer, though I refused it, did me a certain amount of good. I looked down at her. Her face, radiant with youthful beauty, was raised towards me, full of solicitude for me. The breath of desire stirred my senses. Why did jealous aberration force me, despite

the resistance of all the lucid reason that remained to me, to stand there instead of moving away, and utter those words, more dangerous than a torch in a powder magazine :

“ How you love him ! ”

All that was tender and sympathetic in her look was immediately veiled as she answered :

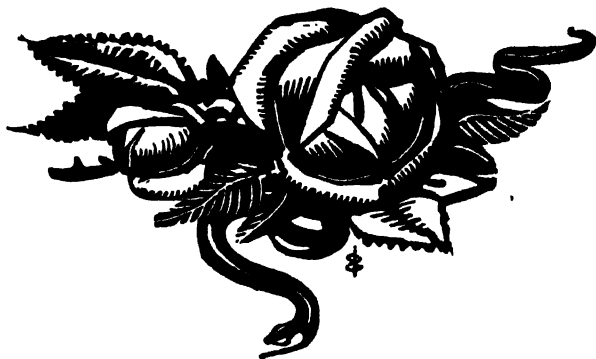
“ Yes, I think my love for him is infinite.”

“ More now than you ever loved him alive ? ”

This time there was no answer.

“ You are right,” I continued. “ He has deserved it ! ”

Whereupon, beaten, I retired to the solitude of my room.





## XVI

THE days that followed, so far as the two of us were concerned, resembled those that precede the breaking-off of diplomatic relations between two nations, when one tries to believe that there is still a possibility of maintaining peace, when each side becomes less exacting in its demands and tries to calm itself, whilst all the time some inside warning suggests that all is vain and feverish arming goes on.

Under a still calm exterior, I felt perfectly certain that Sophie was stiffening her will, resolved to defend that domain beyond the tomb wherein she had taken refuge, whilst as for me, my fixed idea was to tear her from that sanctuary and recapture her, body and soul.

Jealousy renders its victim untimely and clumsy in execution, and obstinate in reflection, but excels in discerning the means and dangers

of revenge. Despite the fact of our being actually isolated from each other by serious moral differences, that Sophie bore me rancour for the wrong I had done her, and that I condemned her conscience in the name of mine, we were still physically the same man and woman who had vowed ourselves each to the other, who through each other had come to know superhuman bliss in love and had been revealed to each other by each other, thanks to that love. My clear-sighted jealousy was now advising me, "It is in that accord pre-established between you and Nature, that conjugality must be refounded." That dictum of Pascal's that "He who tries to become an angel more often becomes a beast" is true in the case of husband and wife more often than it is in the case of lovers; but did I really stand in need of such reasoning? I simply could not bear to go on living like an angel beside my wife, for I was urged on by an imperious desire that was not merely the appetite of Pascal's beast. The anxiety to recapture the whole of her through love, imbued it with a purer ardour, and it seemed to me as though the great flame, if only it were once rekindled, would melt all the clinkers of our dispute, burn up in each of us what offended the other, heal our wounds and consume the very recollection of the crisis we had been through. That is a thing that will never be understood by those numerous human beings

who have never known true love but only a vulgar parody of it ; who consider human love to be vilified by its materialism, instead of admiring and adoring the sublimity that it imposes on matter.

\* \* \* \*

I have felt, while writing the preceding pages, how vividly writing revives the joys or pain of the past, far more acutely even than does memory. I am now approaching the most difficult part of my story, uncertain of being able to carry it through to its conclusion, firstly because what remains to be told is the most painful period of my life, and also because the relating of it presents considerable difficulties to one with my lack of experience. There is no question of big scenes with plenty of interest cleverly worked up, such as are to found at a theatre, but the routine of daily life between husband and wife, both gifted with intelligence and self-control, incapable of outbursts and scenes, and too shy of anything resembling violence not to stifle it as soon as it might be meditated. We were both of us far too exhausted and worn out to engage in a wrangle, even after the rest we had gained from our truce. I was convinced that the explanation of the purple drawing-room was as painful a memory to Sophie as it was to me, and yet it

had only been a brief and fruitless episode, whose result and effect had not been fully felt until after it was over and we were virtually parted from each other, and alone in our solitude and our silence. Not for anything in the world would we have risked such an experience a second time ! Thus we advanced towards each other during the course of those strange days like two people walled up in the same cavern, who grope for each other in the darkness, not knowing whether it is to embrace or fight. That awkward impulsiveness of jealousy had at least one useful attribute, in that it shortened delays that were intolerable to both of us alike. Though consumed with impatience, I was still able to check myself when about to voice questions that would for ever have sealed up my wife's soul for me, but I yet dared to exhibit and formulate the expression of what had been torturing me for days and that I had kept bottled up inside me.

Sophie received this attentively but unresentingly, and I was wrong in feeling surprised at her attitude, for in my Western turbulence of spirit, I was forever forgetting that Sophie was beyond all else controlled by a tyrannical conscience that imposed a sense of equity in her. The words I pronounced were of a surety displeasing to her, but she considered that I had a right to utter them.

It was thus, with an imprudence that was



fortunate since it made appeal to Sophie's sense of right and her conscience, that I ventured to remark :

"The state we are in is but temporary, for neither you nor I can go on with it much longer."

"It can only be prolonged by dissemblance or lying," was her reply, "and anything is better than that."

On another occasion I chanced to remark :

"I don't consider we are any the less husband and wife, just because a moral crisis has caused an upheaval in our lives."

"You're somewhat indulgent towards yourself," she replied, this time after a brief silence and with a rather sad smile, "but all the same, that doesn't wipe out our commitments, does it?"

Thereafter I little by little ventured across the neutral territory that had been kept clear during the truce, spending more time with Sophie and knitting up the snapped threads of our common life. Together we started to take part in the amusements that Paris offers, mostly the serious ones, of course ; but we did not neglect the frivolous either. I have mentioned that I had renounced all kind of social life, but the particular sort of social life I had known with its dissipations and obstacles, would not have served my purpose. On the other hand, the position of a young couple alone amongst

a crowd of folk they do not know and who do not know them, is propitious to a sort of tender intimacy—in order to get more isolated still, they snuggle up to each other, a hand slips through an arm, and fingers meet. I was rather surprised to discover that Sophie raised no opposition to my shy attempt at reconquest, but seemed to lend herself to it with a certain amount of complacency, and I was soon unable to doubt that she wished to assist me.

Under such circumstances, I should really have felt some gratification, but on the contrary, I suffered all the more, and my jealousy became exasperated. Each of our efforts at reconciliation revealed to me the vivid contrast between what had been and what was. Words fail me to describe the tragic change that had taken place. It was as though two travellers had been disporting themselves amongst the peaks of the Alps, the gorges of the Ardeche or the Tarn, and were suddenly to find themselves transported to a flat plain covered with light mist; or like one of those fairy-tales, where the young lovers fall asleep side by side, and waking, find themselves quite old, having been asleep for twenty years. In our case, life's scenery had not altered around us; our faces and bodies were the same as they had been before the upheaval. It was ourselves who had become a different mirror for things, and our hearts that had passed over another stage in our

lives. Those fingers whose contact had once soothed me delightfully, or burned me at other moments, I would squeeze them with a sort of anxiety, and something in me would enquire, "I wonder what she's feeling?" nor did I dare to add, "What do I feel myself?" but I knew. I sometimes felt the spur of a brutal passion that I repressed, the simple urge of a healthy man towards a desirable woman; very often a vague trouble, all my senses tensed in curiosity to perceive the other's emotion, however slight it be, and despair at feeling the other quiet, kindly, curious perhaps herself to notice the awakening of love in me, but incapable of pretending an emotion she was not feeling. Every evening we spent at home would see her absorbed again in that work that separated her from me. Forbid it her? I might have done so, and she would have obeyed me, I was sure of that, but it would have been to add a harder and more execrable trait to the new personality I had become for her, and lose all my chances of winning her back.

That dreadful mental torture of our evenings at home used to finish up round about midnight, when we would leave the room together and I would see Sophie up to her room. There I left her alone after kissing her on the cheek. Like any postulant for love, or a shy fiancé, I would try each evening to gain something more through that kiss than the night before,

and there again, she opposed no resistance whatsoever to me, for she was sweet, but calm. The fear of feeling her cold still forbade me her lips.

Alone again in my single room, I would tell myself off in this fashion :

“ Coward and fool that you are, pull yourself together, and force conclusions with her ! You are sure now that no violence will be needed, and that she herself desires what you wish, for like you, she realizes that our common safety lies in our return to the natural and divine law . . . ”

To encourage myself, I called to mind the words she had spoken on the day she had come to my flat to make such a strange admission to me, “ What attracts me to you, is your face, your speech, the scent of you . . . ”

The woman who had spoken those words was not abjuring her woman’s temperament, and our love had brought me the knowledge that the studious and judicious Sophie could sometimes be transformed into a kind of bashful and loving Bacchante. Could all that be wiped out for motives of pure cerebrality, because I had misunderstood her character and disfigured my moral image in her eyes ?

“ However purified and ennobled a love may be,” I repeated to myself, “ through the reciprocal gift of all we hold most generous and ideal, it is for all that the attraction and the

fusion of bodies, it is our blood and our nerves, our brains and our loins, our lips, our breath and the touch of our skins. The crisis that has upset us can have changed nothing of all that is in us. We are no longer the same blind admirers of each other, but we are still the same lovers ! ”

Those were pathetic days that passed over our two lives, whilst each of us was sounding his own heart and endeavouring to gauge the other's. I realized how dreadfully trying is loneliness of soul in such crises, for whom could I confide in ? The only person I could trust was shut away from my desires. After twenty years of indifference, I crossed the threshold of churches, and drugged my suffering in that lethargic peace that seems to descend from their groined roofs as though the breath of innumerable prayers condensed under the vaulted roofing, were falling in beneficent rain on the very souls that could not pray.

I also called on my beloved dead ; on that good saint my father, whose memory will always cause me pangs of homesickness. I called on Robert and prayed him not to interpose himself between Sophie and me. “ That I didn't deserve,” I told him, “ for I loved you well, and fought against a mighty desire to take nothing from you that was yours by right. If you suffered through me,—and I now believe that you knew and understood all, and that

that was why you shortened your life—it was not my fault. I beg of you, do not set your shadow between the woman you loved and me. Since you were able to keep all that heart that I've lost in part, inspire me with the means to win her back ! ”

No scepticism can withstand these crises of moral overthrow, when everything is unsteady and crumbling. To save oneself from falling into space and darkness, one would grasp at an amulet or the puerile sayings of a clairvoyant.

It may have been an illusion, but it seemed to me that things thereafter began to get better. The goodwill and sentimental simplicity of Sophie were not to be doubted, and it was evident that, in accordance with the rhythm of her nature that was different from mine, she was moving towards the same goal as myself. She desired what I desired with the same hope, but like me, she was finding innumerable obstacles in her path. Unfavourable circumstances lent themselves ill to re-establishment of the past and seemed determined to point out to us that life could not be on the same footing as it had been before. To take one example out of a hundred—we did not venture to enter the purple drawing-room, and the piano had not been opened since that unforgettable evening there.

Frequently Sophie found means to give me

evidence of her wish for a reconciliation. With a surprise that for an instant deprived me of the power of speech, I saw her one evening come and sit at my side and chat to me, whilst the cupboard that held Robert's MSS. remained closed. Further, she talked of her work with confident serenity. It was nearing its conclusion, would soon have to go to press, and she begged me to see to the printing and publication of the second volume as I had done for the first. Soothed and comforted, I held her hands in mine, and I was permitted to rest my aching and heavy head for quite a while on her breast.

That evening, as I was about to leave Sophie in her room, I pressed my lips to hers, and our kiss was long, for she made no effort to avoid it. I experienced a deep emotion, that had not passed when I had withdrawn into my own room, but that emotion was confused and complex.

There was mingled therein pride at reconquest, and the anxiety to know whether it was really reconquest or merely an abortive attempt. There was also the warmth of physical love, but nervous and incoherent.

A kiss desired by reason, a kiss that needs thought, is not a lover's kiss.



## XVII

I HAVE been told that in seminaries, when the professor teaching the technique of the confession refers to the sixth and ninth commandments, both pupils and masters throw themselves on their knees in supplication to the invisible master of our souls and bodies, with the prayer that they, weak mortals, may cross the desert of fire without having their robes singed.

Had I been in charge of such delicate instruction, I should certainly not have neglected that humble and pious custom, but I think that after the prayer I should have addressed the disciples as follows :

“ Know that it is the unhealthy alone who have disguised love in an impure mask, for there can be nothing less impure than human



love. Were it only material, it would be magnified by the power of creation it wields, but in no act accomplished by man is matter more brilliantly illuminated by the spirit, for therein the human brute, who is, after all, closely related to the wild animal, realizes for an instant the difference between himself and the beasts of the field. You should approach the question of love without shame or suspicion. One cannot avoid it, for it has been master of all since the very beginning of things, and any period or society who dares to despise it or cast it off is doomed to fall into sterility or stupor. Since you believe it to be issue of a Creator, approach it in the spirit in which you imagine the Creator approaches it . . .”

The lines I am about to trace, the last in this confession, are not intended for an audience of novices, or, for the matter of that, for any audience at all, since the fact remains that I produced them for one reader only, to whom I propose sending them when the last lines and words are done. But who can to a surety foretell the ultimate destination of a printed page, since its mediocrity will no more save it from preservation than its excellence might guard it against oblivion. If it be the lot of these sheets to reach the eyes of some for whom they were not destined, then I can but suggest that the shy, futile or coarse, as well as the sarsastic type of reader should venture no further than

this point. And you yourself, sincere reader—other than the one to whom I have dedicated this confession of mine—who through blind tradition remain imbued with the idea that love is an unhealthy thing, that it vilifies the spirit, instead of, as I am inclined to believe, spiritualizing the flesh, all that I have said heretofore must have sufficed to show you that my ideas are too far removed from yours and too different.

Leave me the secret of my life, which is not written for you, and which you would be quite unable to understand or fathom. Stop reading here, if your sympathies are not with me.

\* \* \* \*

A conjugal chamber ; a bed where lie husband and wife ; the light of a June morning that filters through the blinds, reddens the angles of the furniture and sets some reflection spinning on the ceiling. This is the setting for a graceful epithalamium.

It has, however, been my unfortunate experience to learn that the selfsame bed can be a bed of agony where a double life of love is dying.

Agony ! There is no other word that can aptly express what the two beings in that bed went through for more than four hours of darkness in such desperation that neither of the two

dared address a word to the other, whilst yet awaiting a word from the other as a parched man gasps for a mouthful of water. Their inability to utter a word was such that each of them, all through those terrible hours of night, pretended to be asleep and believe the other sleeping as well.

In the increasing daylight I watched Sophie's face and form gradually become visible and assume shape, where she lay motionless and turned in my direction. It was her hair that first caught the light like the sombre glow of a nearly extinguished torch ; then I was able to make out the pallor of her profile cupped in the hollow of her left hand, and lastly the pained lines of her mouth. For the second time in my life, I noticed that the lower lashes of her open but downcast eyes were wet with tears. Such resignation and complete despair were expressed in her disordered hair, and the faint trace of tears on the pallor of her bloodless cheeks that in my compassion for her I mustered the strength to utter the syllables of her name.

" You will never be able to forgive me," she said as she raised her eyes to mine.

I caught her in my arms and laid her head on my shoulder, and we shivered as we held each other close, just like two shipwrecked folk on a raft. I spoke close to her ear, but my words had not much sequence and were broken up with barren spaces in between.

"I was all to blame, for I was hateful, like the other. I ought to have understood and gone on waiting——"

"You weren't hateful to me," she replied, moving her lips from my arm to speak. "Oh no ! I wanted what you wanted . . . and then all of a sudden . . . I suppose it's my wretched nature . . . like my bridal night. You remember I told you all about that ? At such times it seems to me that my body is no longer part of me, that it's an inert thing quite independent of me, a thing I don't want anyone at all to touch."

Thereon I was shaken with a strange kind of rage, and letting Sophie fall back on to her pillow, I exclaimed :

"Well, I was more master of my nerves than you, but please don't get it into your head that you moved me on this occasion any more than might have done some hired creature. Anyway, I had the same sense of nausea afterwards."

This insult she did not appear to resent, but enquired, as she looked me squarely in the face with her big, sincere eyes :

"Don't you think I was well aware of that ?"

I was already ashamed of my churlishness, as soon as I had spoken those words to her, and seized her hands :

"I've been saying terrible things to you, but I'm not myself at the present moment. We're two unhappy beings, aren't we ?"

"Yes, that's just what we are."

The echo of that other grief filled me with consternation far more than my own words, but I was afraid to think of the irreparable and muttered :

"Time will heal our wounds."

How difficult it is to go on with this confession, for it brings back to me such bitter memories. I can see Sophie lying there on her pillow, plumbing my gaze with her dry eyes, and I can still hear, as though the drums of my ears were still vibrating to it, that spontaneous and essential dialogue where the whole truth about us was condensed into a few brief syllables.

"No, Antoine, time can do nothing in our case."

"But why murder the Future? I've not changed, and I still want you as I've always done."

"Yes, like a hired creature, and feel resentment and loathing afterwards."

"Reciprocate my desire with yours, then !"

"It's you who have destroyed it."

After those involuntary words had come from us, like sparks from two meeting flints, the crisis might go on, but our Fate was decided. Yet I still continued to question Sophie, with all pity wiped from my heart by the hurt I was inflicting on her by thus prying into her thoughts, and she forced herself to

make answer, but was so distraught and upset that there were moments when I noticed beads of sweat moisten her forehead and the curve of her nostrils. I was the jealous man demanding details of her love for the other, striving bitterly to save his own pride of manhood, after undergoing the same disaster as his rival. I was the absurd reasoner who tries, with the aid of logic, to prove that it is he that ought to be loved, and offers to call humanity to testify to his right. "Are two lives full of vigour to be broken for the passing offence given by a suspicion? A suspicion, do I say? Not even that, but just a doubt! Or must they be smashed up because each of the twain has awoken to the fact that they each of them possess a different conscience, a quite usual thing amongst human couples?" And when she had answered me with desperate humility that it was not the fault of her reason or her humour if the grave moral difference that had arisen between us had destroyed in her the whimsical sources of desire, and if she found herself inert of senses and with all her flesh revolted, as had been her case before meeting me—then I was the lover who gives up the struggle and supplicates with head laid against his mistress's knees, who sobs and laments, offers all his submission and self-abasement, if only she will not leave him; the lover who knows full well that their life together will be

unhealthy, tainted and unbearable, but clings desperately to that life as though it were his sole salvation.

Such a crisis is only comparable to those long drawn battles that go on for hours and hours without their issue being evident, till it comes about at length that some historian studying them after a lapse of many years, realizes that the decision was clear from the moment the two forces met.

Hours succeeded hours. Daylight came broadly, and the hum of Paris grew into a din that struck the walls and windows of our house with its waves of sound. The fight between the energies of the pair of us, beaten down at one moment by weariness and discouragement, rallied the following instant with spasmodic violence, till it seemed to me as though I should never win through, though I should never give up. To-day, while living in those hours called up by memory, the memory evoked by my pen, I can only distinguish one point with any clearness, that not for one instant did I take advantage of Sophie, and that little by little—despite repulses, anger and weakness—her personality and her will mastered my personality and my will so forcefully that the result could no longer remain in doubt.

What were the arms she used to conquer me with, and worse than conquer, overthrow me altogether, till I was compelled to say,

"You are right and I'll do what you think best"?

In the first place, I think it must have been her personal effacement, for I believe she sought the best path, not for herself, but for us both, so that our union might not be sunk in ignominy, but remain at least a great ruin. What could I oppose to her when she told me :

"You are the master. I've sworn to obey you and I didn't take that oath without thinking things over. Tell me to stay and I'll do so, but take care, I beseech you !"

"We can live together like brother and sister," said I in my turn, "as we've been living for the last few weeks, until last night in fact—"

"You admit that those very days have tortured you . . . and see now where this has brought us to !"

"If I swear to you never to . . ."

"You couldn't keep your oath."

"You are the stronger, so refuse me, as you managed to refuse yourself to the other."

"*I hadn't promised myself to him. . .* Think what a beastly thing our married life would be when I should only be giving you the same feeling of satiation and loathing as though I were some hired creature."

In the face of such an argument I could do no more than bend my head.

Something besides her self-effacement brought Sophie out on top. I could not doubt



that the separation that she had come to look upon as inevitable caused her as much pain as it did me ; twice as much indeed, for whereas my man's selfishness absorbed all my faculty for suffering, she was suffering both on her own account and on mine. From that moment she never ceased being maternal towards me, an attitude that had been rather the exception with her previously. Before, it might have been thought that she was holding back in herself that inclination to adopt the maternal attitude that is so common amongst women in love, but I imagine that this was because she wanted me superior to her, wanted to treat me with admiring submission and lean upon me. To-day we were each of us set back in our true rôles ; my weakness leaned on her strength, and I was content to fall back upon her for everything.

I will tell all and confess everything right up to the end. The sacrifice we were preparing to make, in preferring to separate rather than lower ourselves, this double sentimental suicide had about it something slowly voluptuous and a mysterious attraction ; slow because, now that our decision was made, there was no hurry. Peace was reborn in us, that peace engendered by sacrifice, that I have experienced on several occasions by Robert's side at most tragical times during the War, during those nights of waiting when sleep is impossible because one

had to climb out of the trenches and attack a few minutes before dawn. At such times two friends confide their future to each other, after setting the past in order to the best of their ability, and so it was with Sophie and me, just before our great wrench. In our dearly bought serenity, we had to agree over the forms of sacrifice and prepare for the future, and it was then more than ever—I feel bound to admit with passionate humility—that Sophie showed herself as better, more intelligent and higher than me. The Western colouring that had transformed her appearance during the course of her life, first with Robert and then with me, was paling and disappearing from her personality, and bit by bit I saw her once more becoming the stranger I had met at Geneva ; the woman who had told my friend, “ I know that you love me and I want to be yours ! ” ; the woman who had proposed to me with such modest frankness. In that crisis where my uncertain heart, as she had always qualified it, threatened to relent at any moment, she moved not with coldness but with passionate surety. I listened to her, was convinced and obeyed ; and it seemed to me that in my submission I was tasting the last joys of my love. A dim hope still existed in me that I might be able to restore in my wife’s thoughts the ideal image she had conceived of me and that I had defaced.

Ah, if the master for whom these lines are

written might be the only one to read them ! I trust that they may never come to the notice of the men and women I knew when I was frivolling through life, for I can imagine but too well the exclamations that will spring from their lips, "Mysticism ! Madness ! Sadism !" and I can hear the coarse suggestions of their wanton materialism :

"What a couple of fools ! . . . They had only to do this or that . . ."

The proffered suggestions being such as would have indubitably brought us either to the madhouse or the morgue !

If such be their suggestions or their insinuations, it can only be because they have understood nothing of my narrative or of the three personages playing the principal parts in it. Not only were Robert, Sophie and I not neurotics or maniacs, but I really believe that on the contrary, Fate has rarely brought together three minds as clear and as prone to reflection and deduction. Those three beings had got it into their heads that the principal object of human life was a great love. Robert and I had thought so since our early talks whilst we were out of school at Versailles, and Sophie through a sudden revelation that can only be likened to that of the Apostle Paul when he was bearing to Damascus the letters from the High Priest.

From that conviction, or that faith rather,

each of us drew consequences that were not only sincere but logical. Robert shortened his life—not, I am certain, through fear of suffering—but in order to remove the obstacle between Sophie and me. Sophie and I were giving up our life together because that life could only be a shameful parody of our wonderful married love, that would have made us suffer more, an indescribable misery, and would have ended up in a break after all—and in ugliness.

\* \* \* \*

There came a day when two people said goodbye to each other on the doorstep of their home. Their hearts were broken, but their minds were made up and determined, and they were in perfect agreement as to their future. The woman was taking her liberty once more, and the husband had given his word that he would not claim his conjugal rights. She was returning to the country of her birth, to attempt to find that sole survivor of her family. As to whether she would ever come back, neither of them knew for sure; the thing was not probable, but then it was not impossible. The initiative for her return would lie in her hands, for her words had been :

“Who can tell? Time will have the effect of destroying my looks and cooling your ardour !”

As these two beings predestined to each other by Nature, stood before each other, with clasped hands and knowing that those hands once parted would probably never meet again, the husband's eyes, looking into his wife's, recognized in them a look he knew well.

"But then . . ." he stammered. "You love me . . ."

She nodded, for the tide of her emotions was at its zenith.

"Then," added he, "stay with me."

Releasing her hands. "I love you . . . because I'm leaving you," was her last reply.









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